

GREATHEART

by **JOSEPH E
CHIPPERFIELD**



Illustrated by
**GIFFORD
AMBLER**

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by

Joseph E. Chipperfield

Greatheart, an Alsatian puppy, was born in a kennel close to the Mendip Hills, in Somerset, England. When he was about to be sold, he ran off and became a wild dog, living in the woods. During a very bad winter which brought famine into the lives of many wild creatures, Greatheart became their friend and their champion, and, as a result, was made an animal with a price on his head.

Greatheart followed the trail of two of his otter friends into a strange part of England, and fell into a trap. He was rescued by Lionel Radmore, a farmer who loved dogs. By patient effort, Radmore wins the wild dog completely, and a great affection springs up between the two. When Lionel goes away on military service, Greatheart sets off in search of him, is adopted by the army and trained as a guard dog.

When his master is missing in action, Greatheart is inconsolable, and does not rest until he finally finds him, buried under the debris of a demolished barracks. But Radmore is blinded by his war experiences, and so a whole new life opens up for him and for Greatheart, when Greatheart is trained as a guide dog for the blind.

This is a true and a stirring story for dog lovers of all ages. It is ably illustrated by C. Gifford Ambler, who has convincingly caught the sensitive mood of this fine animal story.



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GREATHEART
The Salvation Hunter

By the same Author :

Storm of Dancerwood

Grey Chieftain

Beyond the Timberland Trail

Greeka: Eagle of the Hebrides

Silver Star (*in preparation*)



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G. M. R.

"His mother seemed to take little notice of him"

GREATHEART

The Salvation Hunter

The Epic of a Shepherd Dog

by

JOSEPH E. CHIPPERFIELD

Illustrated by

C. GIFFORD AMBLER



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DEDICATED TO
MAX
AND ALL DOGS WHO SERVE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author wishes to convey his acknowledgments to Miss Lilian M. Shrimpton of the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association for the valuable data and assistance given to him when compiling the details introduced in the latter portion of this book.

Although the actual names of towns have been used, no reference is intended to any living person connected with this excellent movement. This also applies to those engaged in that equally valuable work undertaken by the Army Dogs' Training School.

J. E. C.

BOOK ONE

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE WILD

CHAPTER ONE

GREATHEART was a perfect mystery. He had always been something of a mystery from the very day he was born. To begin with, nobody in Buckland or round about knew from whence he came. He had appeared seemingly from the wild—a large black-and-fawn dog with wolf-like characteristics, making his home with the Radmores, and loving Lionel more than anything else on earth. The inhabitants of Buckland-in-the-Moor first saw him standing on an outcrop of granite, mute and motionless, his nose suspiciously testing the wind currents; otherwise, not a muscle moving nor an eyelid quivering. Immense and beautiful, he seemed to dominate all the moorland—a pure-blooded Shepherd Dog with ears smartly erect—a magnificent statue guarding that which was his natural heritage! His body, lithe and powerful ending in the thick bushy tail so like that of a wolf, amazed everybody. Not a single person could understand that he was a dog—a dog with the blood of countless champions running through his veins. He and the surrounding moorland seemed to be one and yet so distinctly apart—one morose and misty, the other alert and watchful as if hewn out of the granite upon which he stood.

Greatheart had wandered far before coming to Buckland-in-the-Moor. He had dwelt in the vicinity of Exmoor, and during the long winter that had passed, he had buried himself in the snow for warmth as had his ancestors of old. His sojourn on the Somerset hills had

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turned him into a clever hunter. For him the law of survival of the fittest had been miraculously adapted to meet his immediate requirements, and he had quickly reverted to the type from which had sprung all dogs. The fact that he was better able to use his cunning and bodily strength than most of his race had, in the end, turned him into an extremely intelligent animal.

But for all this he was a dog—the companion of man. His struggle for existence had not made him forget that his forebears had been with man, and that he, himself, had first seen the light of day in the home of man.

To Greatheart, for many long days after he had been born, his playground was the tiled floor of a kitchen. There were so many others like him—little fluffy creatures, and the only thing that disturbed their puppyish enthusiasm was the huge fire that seemed to spit at them.

His mother, large and fawn-coloured, seemed to take little notice of him. She had so many more like him, all of them needing more care and attention than he. Because he was greedy, when he approached her at feeding time, she often kicked him away and he would sit dejected, waiting until she was prepared to administer to his needs. On those few occasions when she refused to nourish him, someone with a kind, reassuring voice, and big, clumsy hands, would pick him up and feed him out of a bottle. By being fed thus, Greatheart soon realized that the person with the clumsy hands and kind voice was the means of keeping him alive, and so, whilst young, he began to look on man as Somebody who was mighty and gentle, with a peculiar understanding for creatures as helpless as he.

How placidly the days passed in that kitchen with its fire that always spluttered and gave out such a tremendous heat! There was a wide opening in the wall through

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which at certain hours streamed a golden radiance, and it became Greatheart's most ambitious desire to go through that opening, which was really a door, and so bathe himself in the light that possessed a quality so different from that of the spluttering fire.

Then one evening, a little girl came to look at him. She laughed with delight and permitted him to lick her hands.

Greatheart had seen her once or twice before, but never had she shown such interest in him as an individual. She had golden, fluffy hair, and her eyes were of an extraordinary blue and appeared full of light that somehow attracted the dog.

Her father, who accompanied her, reminded the young dog of the man with the clumsy hands, and when the child laughed at Greatheart's puppyish wriggings, she was given permission to pick him up.

"Isn't he big, Daddy," she exclaimed, kissing Greatheart on the tip of his moist, cold nose.

Her father smiled.

"He's the best puppy of the lot," he answered. "When he is sold, he should fetch quite a large sum of money."

"Must you sell him?"

"I'm afraid I must. I couldn't keep every puppy I rear."

"But he's so lovely and fluffy."

"I know, dear," her father answered. "They all are when they're young."

The child pouted with disappointment. When she released Greatheart, she did so with a sigh, and instantly determined in her mind not to make too much fuss of him, for she knew that if she did she would hate having to give him up when eventually he was sold.

All too soon those delightful days in the kitchen came to an end, for one morning the puppies' quarters in the

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house were abandoned for a roomy kennel with a wire run attached.

At first the kennel struck Greatheart as altogether cheerless and dull. The spluttering fire was missed and the man who used to feed him out of a bottle visited him less often.

For one whole day he sulked; he simply would not play, neither would he eat. He spent most of his time sleeping, and in his dreams he gave vent to a queer rumbling noise in his throat, the forerunner of that growl that was to make him a most feared animal. Then on the dawn of the second day, the unexpected happened. Greatheart was awake long before his brothers and sisters, and as he opened his eyes and stretched himself, he saw, through the open door of the kennel, that a strange grey light was creeping along the field that lay outside the enclosure. For a long while he lay watching it, his nose resting on his outstretched paws.

He was irresistibly attracted. The colour that grew in the sky beat upon his eyes until the optic nerves pulsed with a strange new sense of well-being. The blood in his young body began to sing through his veins, and for the first time he knew that he was seeing something that was distinct from his own personal relationships.

For a short while longer he lingered in the semi-darkness of the kennel, while the age-old instincts of those who had given birth to the very first dog struggled within his immature mind for supremacy. Greatheart became conscious of something within urging him to leave the security of the kennel and brave the light that now moved with assurance across the fields and even along the confines of the run itself.

Although he was not aware of it, these were his first tangible generalizations of the world that lay outside the family circle that had hitherto made up his entire existence.

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He became more and more interested when he saw the last of the shadows disappear, and pricked his ears when he heard a blackbird juggling with his notes from a nearby thorn tree.

Then with dazzling ribbons of light, the sun swept above the eastern hills, and a golden radiance lay upon the fields.

As the sunlight became more clearly marked outside the kennel, Greatheart hesitated no longer but crept silently out into the run only to stand with amazement at the sudden thrill of excitement that went through him when he felt the morning breeze rippling along his back and caressing his ears.

Still the blackbird sang from his perch in the thorn tree, and the sunlight grew mellow and spilled, warm and delightfully comforting, upon Greatheart's body as he stood awaiting any further revelation that might be made by Nature—the Mother of all Living!

CHAPTER TWO

AS the day progressed, Greatheart's joy knew no bounds. The sunlight that morning held a hint of approaching summer and gave the dog a sense of pleasure he had never before experienced. He did not play much that day, but followed the sunlight as it moved quietly along the narrow aisle of the run. He found that it was far more comforting than the fire near which he had loved to lie when he was confined to the kitchen. But when towards evening the sun disappeared behind Crook's Peak and the shadows began to lengthen upon the grass, Greatheart found himself filled with misgiving that, before dusk, changed to an intense longing and regret. He did not realize that there would be another tomorrow, with the sun perhaps a little warmer and the day seeming a little longer.

Close on the trailing garments of the twilight came the moon and stars of Greatheart's first real night. He was not at first aware of the transformation scene that was being enacted outside the darkness of the kennel, for like his brothers and sisters he was fast asleep, snuggled against the warm flank of his mother.

Greatheart awoke in the very early hours of the morning. Two-o-o, the very old Exmoor owl who long since had migrated to this more distant part of Somerset, had given the hunting call, and the sound penetrated the young dog's sleep, causing him to awaken instantly. He listened intently, his whole body quivering. As he stared out of the partially open doorway of the kennel he saw, rising starkly against the moonlit radiance of the sky, the silhouette of the tree on which the owl was perched, and beyond the tree, slowly sinking westward, the burnished shield of the moon itself.



"Greatheart hesitated no longer"



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The dog continued to stare. Deep down in his puppyish mind something was striving to remember an event long lost in the mists of antiquity—an event when a wolf-like cub had stumbled, half awake, from a dark cave hidden deep in a rocky mountainside, and gazed up at a blood-red hunter's moon.

The effort of instinctive memory, already weakened by successive generations of dogs, was finally defeated in immediate inquisitiveness.

The dog crept away from his mother's side. For a moment he stood at the entrance of the kennel, his nose sniffing the cold, night air. Again the owl hooted, and Greatheart, without further hesitation, stepped out into the run.

He paused in a mood of apprehension. There was a strange, undefinable movement in the night. The puppy's keen ears caught every sound, and because he was too young to distinguish one from the other, he grew nervous and prepared to return to the security of the kennel.

Again old Two-o-o deterred him, this time by making a silent, winnowing flight across the field, and uttering once more the hunter's call when he found a perch on a young larch at the rear of the house.

Whilst Greatheart had not heard the sudden flight of the owl, he was conscious of the dark shape sweeping upwards. The fur on his back bristled as he sensed that here was something he had never as yet accepted as within the realm of his experience.

His determined spirit was instantly roused. He thus knew that whilst fear was a vital part of his mental equipment, there was also something more dominant that sprang from those who, for centuries, had lived under the fierce law of the survival of the fittest.

It seemed that he had learnt the meaning of courage, knowing instinctively that it must be uppermost in all

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things if he was to become like his sire who trod with assurance in this world of strange inhabitants.

And so, in a split second of time, Greatheart bridged the gap that lay between helplessness and the will to be independent; and it was old Two-o-o who was the unconscious teacher of events that had, till then, never existed in the puppy's experience of known things.

He commenced to pace the run, the moonlight throwing his shadow in an oblique mass before him. This too was new, and he could not understand it. The dark patch moved when he moved, and it was impossible to overtake it. It was always before him. He tilted his head in an endeavour to fathom what it meant. He growled and tried to leap on the distorted mass of darkness, but when it continued to elude him he soon tired of such futile sport.

Meanwhile the moon was sinking and becoming paler. In the tree tops was the first audible whisper of approaching morning as the wind lingered amidst the far-flung branches. Inanimate objects became filled with a queer pulsating form of life, and the scent of dewy grass became more clearly evident as the wind blew colder but showed less tendency to sweep on to far distant places. As the moon grew wan, the stars seemed to glow more brightly, and the hour before dawn was marked with a suggestion of dampness in the atmosphere.

Greatheart had realized that the world outside the limits of the run was a wonderful place—a place of subtle movement in which lived creatures more courageous than he. He also realized that there were things that had no direct relationship with the world as he now understood it—things such as the shadow that had dwindled as the moon sank to become eventually lost in the bank of purplish cloud that was rising over the sea.

The young dog had lost all touch with time, and

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was not aware that it was becoming colder. He had subconsciously acquired the habit associated with older animals of the canine race—that of staring into space as if in idle contemplation.

For a puppy he was progressing far in advance of his age.

When Greatheart had reached the age of seven months, he was taken to a dog show and exhibited in the puppy class. The judge, on considering his points, declared him to be the best Shepherd Dog puppy in the show, and accordingly awarded him the first prize.

A month later he was sold. It happened so quickly that Greatheart was mystified by the sudden change that had taken place. Yet it all began so simply. It was on a bright sunny morning when a stranger visited him as he lay dozing in the puppy run.

The man with the clumsy hands was instructed to put the young dog on a lead and trot him up and down the meadow while the stranger watched through narrowed eyes, appraising Greatheart's easy movement and willingness to do what was required of him. It needed no experienced eye to see that Greatheart was an exceptional dog, and the visitor soon agreed to purchase him.

After the business had been fully completed, Greatheart was led to a large motor-car, and it was then, when he saw the box on wheels in which he was expected to go, that his heart failed him.

With a quick backward movement, he had slipped his head through the collar that had always been loose about his neck. In an instant he was off, racing down the white winding road as fast as his legs could carry him, fear aiding him in his swiftness. The road was very hilly, and in less than five minutes Greatheart was winded. After about a quarter of a mile, the road dipped steeply into a valley that was skirted both left and right

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by a wood of birch and larch. Hearing shouts far behind him, and thinking of the huge box on wheels, the dog did not hesitate, but left the road and made off through the wood that grew darker and thicker as he loped along.

Suddenly he stopped. Something very large rushed across his path, only to disappear into the dimness of the forest.

He whimpered with fear, and became conscious of a vast and unutterable loneliness. There was no mother to watch over him now; no man with clumsy hands to caress him. He was all alone . . . alone in a strange place that was filled with creatures moving amidst the tall, whispering trees.

In the space of less than half an hour, the whole world had changed. By slipping his collar and running away, he had forfeited all those little things that had made up his environment.

Another curious creature, dark and furry, sped across his path. This time Greatheart bristled and barked, and curious echoes were thrown back at him.

He sniffed, but the scents that assailed his nostrils were all foreign. He looked about him, trying to determine the way he had come. But all the paths between the trees appeared the same, and they all ended in a dim obscurity.

He continued to sniff the air nervously, but the smell of pine and birch-wood oppressed him and filled him with troubled thoughts. He knew that there was no smell like this at home; there was no such quietness either.

When he finally went on, wandering through the trees, his ears were no longer erect and his tail drooped between his legs. At times he slunk along low to the ground, so like a wolf whose resemblance he bore. More than a score of times did he stop with ears alert, hoping

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to catch some familiar sound that would lead him out of the maze into which he had wandered.

But there was always the silence—the silence that was intermittently broken by the wind calling through the tall pines. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

THE wood in which Greatheart was lost lay on the southern flank of the Mendips. It was not so extensive as the dog imagined, although it certainly covered a fairly wide area, becoming thin and sparse where the foothills sank towards Wells and Glastonbury, to become finally merged in the great central plain south of Sedgemoor.

To anybody coming out from the wood on that southern slope of the Mendips, Brent Knoll was the most important visible landmark, seeming to guard the distant approaches to Exmoor. The fields that nestled between the Mendips and Brent Knoll were comprised of good pasture land, where there was an abundance of sheep, reared on the isolated farmsteads that were often hidden from view by clumps of trees planted to break the force of the north-westerly winds.

Whilst the country adjoining the plain was full of promise, Greatheart knew nothing of it. He knew for the present only the wood with its tall trees and innumerable aisles that all seemed alike, and led to gloomy clearings in which small brown creatures appeared to be for ever at play.

As the young dog continued disconsolately on his way, the forest became less dense and the air less oppressive. Suddenly the ground seemed to fall away, and Greatheart found himself standing on the edge of a deep coombe. The dog gazed down the broken slope, sniffing the air for the man-smell. Then he saw a spiral of smoke drifting to the left of him. Again he sniffed the air and whined joyously, for he could scent man in the smoke—man, who had, in the past, fed him out of a bottle and treated him so kindly.

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Slowly and with caution, he clambered down the steep descent, and reaching a narrow closed-in valley, found himself standing almost level with a cottage that, through the years, had sunk somewhat below the surface of the ground.

Waving his tail in pleasurable anticipation, he crept up to the wide open door, and peering into the cottage, saw a woman with a baby held in her arms.

As she leant over the child, her tousled hair fell over her eyes, and when she raised her head to flick it away, she saw Greatheart. Startled, for she had never seen an animal like him before, she let out a piercing scream. Instantly, her husband—a big, brawny, labouring fellow, appeared from a room at the rear of the cottage, and seeing the dog, picked up a horse whip and with much swearing drove the animal up the coombe until he was only too glad to seek once again refuge in the forest.

Greatheart stood shivering in the shelter of the pines. His flanks ached where the whip-cord had flicked them, and he panted with keen distress. He continually whined and looked longingly towards the valley in which the cottage was hidden, but he did not attempt to leave the wood again.

Already he was learning that there were times when not even man could be trusted, and it was a bitter blow to his hopes, for he had had confidence in man, feeling that man would be the means of giving him that comfort he once had when he was a puppy in the kitchen of the house where he had been born.

By now, the sun was well on the decline, and long shadows began to gather in the forest. The quavering "To-who-oo" of an early owl disturbed the dog, and when he heard the sudden swishing of wings above his head, the thought of flight immediately sprang into his mind. Yet he did not move. Something stronger than

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himself seemed to tell him to stand his ground. He began to understand that as man had turned against him, he would have to fall back on his hereditary courage to sustain him in moments of crisis. And as he stood under the trees, listening to every strange sound, he felt that he had done this same thing before, and was no longer alarmed, experience aiding him in this, his first conscious moment of independence. His head was held just a little higher and his tail no longer hung between his legs. He felt that the forest was his and that he had every right to be in it, hunting for food and sleeping within the shadow of the trees.

Lower and lower sank the sun until finally it crept below the horizon. But still the young dog stood upon the edge of the forest as if anxious to see the last of the day. The afterglow faded from the skies; a few clouds that had been tinted with crimson and gold became leaden in hue, and so commenced Greatheart's first night alone.

He found a comfortable spot under a dwarfed pine that grew in a mossy hollow, and eventually fell into a restless slumber.

It was getting on towards midnight when an old fox—Reynard of the split ear—loped through the wood on some hazardous adventure. He was as cunning as he was old. His past record for one who, over many years had successfully outwitted the hunt, was as inglorious as was that of his many deeds of roguery. He was known over all the Mendip district as the fox with the split ear, and the Master of the local Foxhounds often recalled the occasion when Reynard had been gripped by Daybreak—the youngest bitch of the pack—and had finally made his escape by a smart trick that had resulted in the split ear. The Master related the incident whenever he had an opportunity. It appeared that the old fox had given the hounds a gruelling run on that particular day, and had managed to shake them off at a point

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a little west of Rodney Stoke, and Daybreak, running ahead of the main pack, disappeared into a belt of woodland clinging to an escarpment that had always been considered by the Meet as a particularly dangerous spot. Whether or not Reynard, from past experience, had known this, and judged the locality as safe in which to take refuge, was open to conjecture. His intention, whatever it was, was badly shaken when Daybreak picked up his scent, and, daring the acclivity of the gorge, cornered him as he was about to enter a secure earth. But being a hill fox who had survived many ordeals, he was quick to realize that only skill and cunning could save him from destruction.

As Daybreak bit into his ear, he made a quick, backward thrust until the hound was straddled across him, and then he kicked out savagely with his hind legs, startling Daybreak so that she loosened her grip. The appearance of the Master of the Hunt at the summit of the gorge did not add to her confidence, and as he shouted, the bitch half-turned, and Reynard in one determined bound was away, slipping down the slope and only regaining his feet when he reached the bottom. Before either hound or huntsman had recovered from their surprise, Reynard had vanished, travelling over broken ground that would be difficult for the hounds to cover should they again be set on his trail.

That was three winters ago, and on this night of Greatheart's first sojourn in the forest, Reynard was making for Crosscombe, treading silently one of the mossy aisles that led to the outer edge of the forest.

As he approached close to where Greatheart was sleeping, his keen nose warned him that a stranger was in the vicinity. He pricked his ears, the one torn by the teeth of Daybreak being strained to the utmost to catch any suspicious sound.

Then his eyes, long accustomed to the darkness, saw

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the young dog curled up under the dwarfed pine, his nose buried deep in his bushy tail.

Reynard of the split ear experienced a sudden qualm of fear. For one brief instant he stripped his teeth in a silent snarl. Then, with his left fore-leg slightly raised, he stared, a little troubled, for the sleeping animal resembled one of his own tribe. But it was not the dog's similarity of appearance to other members of the vulpine tribe that made him pause perplexed. It was something else that stirred in him, something deep down that he could not assimilate nor determine into tangible knowledge. It might have been some strange singing in his blood, inherited from his father—the old Exmoor fox, "He of the missing brush-tip" who, for a considerable period, had accepted the Shepherd Dog, "Storm of Dancerwood", as an animal unlikely to molest the vulpine race.

Notwithstanding, Reynard of the split ear was unprepared to take unnecessary risks. The blood of his parent was subdued in the cunning and wisdom that had been his main support during his somewhat harassed existence, and he broke away from the track he had been following, making a complete detour to reach the edge of the forest.

He was still somewhat apprehensive even when he had left the forest far behind. There kept recurring in his mind the vision of the young dog curled up asleep under the dwarfed pine. And it was a vision that, strangely enough, grew more familiar when it should have receded and become just a vague memory that had lost its power to disturb as time removed it from the circle of immediate impressions.

For him—in this his fifth year of vagabondage—there was no experience of long winter days of famine and death for all wild things. He had always existed with an ease uncommon to the lot of most of his race. Luck had always seemed to be with him. In times of

crisis when he stood alone, his cunning and peculiar sense of woodcraft had aided him, and save for the morning when the hound Daybreak had trapped him, he had met with little to foretell the doom that might one day be his.

Thus, despite the recurring memory of the dog he had seen in the forest, it was not given to him to realize that perhaps there would come a time when that same animal might be the means of keeping him alive. Not even Nature—the god of all wild creatures—could tell him that.

Only long winter days of famine and death could have sharpened his perspective and given him unforgettable experience, and these he had never known. Such experiences as he had known, even the dread experience of being hunted, had always been with him. They were instinctive and common to every fox, male and female, and when once overcome, soon became as though they had never been.

Yet as he loped along, intent on petty pilfering from a neighbouring farmhouse, the impression he had gained of the sleeping dog became ever more dominant in his subconscious mind. Out of twenty thousand other dogs, that particular dog would be one he would immediately recognize . . . and this, not only because he had a shape similar to that which he himself bore. It was that queer singing in his blood that sought to tell him, that odd sensation that had come to him when he had glimpsed the curled-up shape. And whilst he was slow in grasping its significance, this was an experience he had never before encountered and he refused to acknowledge it because he was Reynard of the split ear, who for five winters had stood alone, taking no mate and indulging in escapades that delighted his heart.

Even when a few minutes later he raided a hen-coop and made off with a plump fowl hanging from his jaws,

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the impression in his mind was still active, becoming one of the million other similar reflexes that must in due time mould his future action.

Meanwhile, Greatheart slept quietly under his tree, and the long night and its stars sped away with the hours until it was again another day. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

GREATHEART was up and about early the next morning, and long before the sun rose in the east, he had found a stream and had refreshed himself in its cool depths.

Above the dark forest wisps of cloud drifted across a sky intensely blue in which the swallows tumbled and turned in the eddying wind currents. Somewhere amidst the pines a robin chirped and a thrush commenced to whistle to his mate. From a distant valley came the bleating of sheep and the neighing of a horse. A new day, with its toil and cares, was about to commence.

Although still very subdued, Greatheart, as he wandered through the aisles amidst the trees, knew that if he wanted to live, he would have to obtain food. Instinct told him that the little brown creatures with whisking tails that scurried away at his approach and buried themselves in the ground had, in some way or another, to be caught. The dog sensed that they would be good to eat, and after watching the manner of their departure, set about his hunting. All that day he hunted in vain. The rabbits were too quick for him!

As evening came creeping through the trees, the dog was feeling weak from hunger, and when he rested himself in a small clearing near the stream he quickly fell asleep.

All night long he was disturbed by the hunting call of the owl who had a plucking post for his victims on a branch just above where Greatheart lay in restless slumber.

Next morning, after having drunk of the stream, he went more cautiously about his hunting. The need for food had become more urgent, and despite the fact that

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he had reserved his strength during sleep, his endurance was almost gone. There were hollows now in front of his hindquarters. His eyes were red and narrowed to slits.

Despite the bodily weakness that was now manifest in his gait, Greatheart set forth with a grim determination. He knew that he could not survive much longer if he did not eat, and the brown rabbits were the only prey he felt he could stalk with hope of success.

Suddenly his ears became pricked; he sniffed the air. Then he became taut, his body ready to leap forward. A very young rabbit was sitting up in a low runnel which, during days of storm, carried flood water that fell from the trees that arched it over.

Greatheart rose to his feet and moved silently, his body low to the ground. The rabbit had his back to the dog and did not see him coming, but his ears caught the sound of a drumming on the ground as others of his race sounded the warning that danger was near. He was about to dart away when Greatheart pounced, and the rabbit knew not what manner of thing had struck him, for he died instantly.

This scanty meal put new life in the dog, and profiting from experience, he kept near to the paths marked out by countless feet that went backwards and forwards to the various burrows that were often dug beneath the roots of the trees.

So still did Greatheart lie, that the rabbits did not sense his presence until too late, and before nightfall the dog had added to his store of food by killing one large buck and a small doe.

Within a week he had acquired a certain skill in hunting, and dog-like, not forgetting that the wood had given him shelter on that first night away from the fires of man, he remained in the vicinity, sleeping at nights beneath the dwarfed pine.

The summer that year had been one of prolonged

drought, and when the stream ran dry and Greatheart had to go to the foot of the hill for his drinking water, he began to wander into the plain, only returning to the wood when the evening shadows were lengthening. In spite of the miles he sometimes travelled, he could not altogether break himself from the habit of going back to the windfall of leaves he had made under the pine. He felt secure in the wood. Because it was somewhat isolated, few people ventured into its habitual gloom, and this suited Greatheart, remembering as he did the man in the cottage who had driven him away with a whip that had stung his flanks.

Meanwhile, the dog had acquired much cunning, and almost rivalled Reynard of the split ear in the many strategies he adopted to steal from farms and yet not be discovered. Moreover, like the fox, he became wise with the wisdom known only to those creatures who inhabit the wild. He soon grew to know the shape of every wood and hill in the district, knew too where the best hunting grounds lay, and which roads were most frequented by man whom he wished to avoid.

Throughout the whole of that summer, many complaints were made by the farmers whenever they congregated on market day. Some told of broken fences, of hens missing, and of sheep showing signs of fear when penned near certain woods.

Most of them blamed the foxes, and Reynard of the split ear was often named the principal culprit, as, unlike Greatheart, he was known in the district, often being spoken of as "a gurt vox with a split ear".

The dog had seen the old fox once or twice, slinking through the wood with a plump bird hanging from his jaws, and perceiving that he was a hunter like himself, did not attempt to molest him.

The days began to shorten; the leaves on the trees turned to russet and began to fall. The meadows were

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shorn of their wheat and barley, and as the countryside became bare so did the days become darker and colder.

It was towards the end of the autumn that Greatheart began to make excursions across the "Great Plain". He enjoyed running through the tall grass of the lush meadows, liking the feel of it on his flanks. But there was more to it than that. He soon learnt that in the grass lurked creatures not unlike large rabbits which, when hunted, ran a zig-zag course that not only perplexed him but put to a severe test his cunning and endurance.

This was his first acquaintance with Sekooshoo of the hare family, and those he saw from a distance attracted him more than anything else by reason of their size, and he was keenly desirous of running them to earth.

But he discovered that they were not such easy prey as the rabbits, never making for burrows, but keeping to the fields, particularly those which had been recently ploughed. The greatest difficulty he experienced in coursing them came from the fact that he so seldom saw them until it was too late. This disturbed him, for dog-like, he relied more on his nose than on his vision.

In this respect the hares presented something of a problem. They appeared to lurk in the most unexpected places, often selecting open country where other creatures would have sought cover, and their general colouring, so closely resembling that of the fields they most frequented, made them almost invisible to the dog.

It was on one late October morning that Greatheart made his first intimate acquaintance with Sekooshoo. The contact had a queer effect on him. It was nigh mid-day when the dog loped across a field of stubble, stopping occasionally as the stiff grass dug into his pads. His shadow came round the bole of a tree first, and fell upon the animal which lay there.

Until an hour or so before, Sekooshoo had been

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running to save her life. A huntsman had discovered the hare's hiding-place in a meadow skirting Westcote Hill. The whips had instantly taken the beagles from the innumerable scents that had occupied so much of their time and laid them directly on the line of the animal they sought.

As she lay in the field, Sekooshoo heard the sound of the huntsman's horn, coming from the summit of the hill, and her heart thumped wildly when she realized what it meant.

As the beagles followed closely the line they now so easily scented, travelling the exact course taken by the hare scarcely an hour before, the whips urged them on with wild cries, shouting: "Yoi! Yoi! Up, Daisy! Follow, Spotty!"

In a moment, so it seemed, the hounds were almost upon her.

The pack was almost frenzied in its eagerness to make a kill, and Sekooshoo, in sudden terror, leapt up from her hiding-place. The beagles with one accord uttered a baying cry, and were after her in a swift, headlong rush, stumbling one against the other and losing ground, which gave the stricken animal time in which to set the pace.

Sekooshoo went zig-zagging across the meadow. Already her lighter bones were turning to liquid in her body; terror, which made her kind so timid, was spelling doom to her frantic efforts to escape. Then she came to the railway embankment. A train from Wookey to Yatton was rumbling down the incline. The engine-driver sounded his whistle, but the hare thought of only one thing—to escape the beagles!

In a moment of desperation she had clambered up the embankment, slipping across the railway track like a flash, hearing as she did so the hoarse shouting of the sportsmen who were concerned with the safety of the

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pack. With whips and much cursing, they managed to break up the beagles' formation, and by the time the train had passed, Sekooshoo was well away.

She must have covered more than seven miles before she began to stiffen with exhaustion, and as she continued across a field of stubble, was unable to feel the hurt the stiff grass was causing her feet. Through blurred vision she saw, seeming a great way off, the stout outline of a tree, and it was to reach the tree that she put forth her last effort of speed. Her heart was near to bursting; her eyes blind with the terror of exhaustion. But blind though she had become, she went straight as an arrow towards the tree. Agitation caused her to stumble a little and when at last the tree was reached, and vision was partly restored to her, she saw it only as a column rising up before her, its branches outstretched and seeming almost to touch the sky and obscure the sun that had reached its zenith.

With a curious crying in her throat, Sekooshoo flung herself down, heaving and straining as the blood in her veins appeared to dry and clot. Her legs twitched, but a great peace was coming over her and she seemed alone for the first time in a quiet place.

For half an hour or more she lay there; then a shadow fell over her as an animal she had not heard came round the bole of the tree. As she looked up, her half-blind eyes saw a head with pricked ears, reminding her vaguely of Reynard of the split ear. But it was not he. The scent was different.

Then she knew.

With a despairing cry she jumped to her feet; stood up on hind legs for a moment; then her eyes closed and her fore-paws dropped from across her chest as her strength went out like running water. And death came to Sekooshoo under the tree she had thought a refuge.

Greatheart, startled at the last cry the hare gave,

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watched her fall from her sitting posture, and stood unmoving as she rolled over on to her side.

The dog had witnessed nothing like this before, and he could not understand it. He sniffed Sekooshoo's warm fur; nuzzled her body as if seeking to give back to it the life that had so suddenly departed.

He then stood over the hare, staring away across the field. But his jaws did not gape with anticipation. He knew that the death that had overtaken Sekooshoo was altogether different from that which had overtaken creatures he himself had hunted and slain.

And when a few minutes later he loped off on his way, Sekooshoo lay unmolested where she had fallen, while the sunlight fell warm and honey coloured upon the brown fur that was already showing signs of losing its lustre.

An hour later she lay in gloom, the branches of the tree throwing a heavy shadow upon the stubble and upon the fertile earth from whence had sprung Sekooshoo and all other creatures of the wild.

CHAPTER FIVE

OCTOBER that year was the herald of the hard winter that was to come. The last of the migrants left early in the month, while the field-fare and redwing—members of the thrush family—arrived from Scandinavia.

Greatheart disliked the cold, and instinct made him seek out a new place in which to sleep at night. He found a suitable spot amidst a cairn of rocks west of the wood and adjacent to an old disused quarry.

Reynard of the split ear also moved his quarters, taking possession of a "sett" abandoned by Brock the Mendip badger. The "sett" was well placed beneath the roots of a very ancient oak, and the interior was covered by Brock's hair, particularly where he had continuously rubbed himself when making use of the many tunnels with which the "sett" abounded.

In the tree above the "sett" nested Krecka the raven and Recka his mate, who for some reason best known to themselves had reverted to the nesting habits of their near cousins—the crows. Both disliked the idea of having Reynard for a neighbour. They knew from past experience that sooner or later they would be disturbed by men and hounds. For so it had happened in the past and they had no doubt that it would happen again.

Meanwhile, Greatheart had taken to hunting near a stream that flowed under the railway embankment on its downhill course from Ebbor Farm.

The dog had got used to seeing the trains passing and repassing up and down the line and in time scarcely heeded them at all.

It was while he was down by the stream that Krecka saw him for the first time. The raven flew low the better

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to discern the animal beneath him. The dog merely glanced up at the sound of Krecka's call to his mate, and then resumed his sauntering along the stream's bank.

Krecka was much interested, particularly when he found that often the dog left the remains of half-eaten rabbits near the stream.

One morning the raven was in a playful mood. He saw the dog rolling in the grass and settled near at hand to watch him.

Greatheart, who had lost the art of puppyish play in his strenuous efforts to exist in the wild, was suddenly conscious that he was very, very lonely.

He set his head at an inquisitive angle, his ears pricked as he surveyed the raven. Krecka became daring. He had found a partially skinned frog which he picked up in his beak, and then flying low over Greatheart dropped it almost between his outstretched paws. He then alighted some ten yards away, and twisting his head a little, watched to see what the dog would do.

Greatheart knew that the raven expected something of him, and rising to his feet, sniffed the frog and whilst not liking its taste picked it up, and leaping about, tossed it into the air as he would have done a ball had he possessed one.

Krecka enjoyed this display of friendliness, and when his mate joined him, both flew in circles over the dog as he leaped and played.

On the second day Krecka came alone, and finding Greatheart again by the stream, hopped to within a few feet of the dog. He cocked an eye up to the sky and then began to talk to Greatheart after the manner of ravens, while the dog himself appeared much interested, understanding little of what Krecka was saying but knowing full well that the raven was kindly disposed towards him.

Later in the day when Recka flew down to the

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stream to search for frogs, she saw her mate indulging in a most boisterous game above the dog. He was flying low, continually folding his wings against his body and rolling sideways. Once or twice he soared high, setting his wings for the descent, and with a hoarse cry of enjoyment went into a slow dive which carried him to within a few feet of Greatheart's back.

Then she saw the dog commence to race round and round in ever-widening circles while Krecka kept pace with him, flying just a little to the rear of the leaping animal.

But Recka was hungry and alighting near the stream began to search for frogs in the rushes, spiking them through the head with her beak when one more unfortunate than his neighbour fell a victim to her quick thrusts. She could carry six or seven frogs in her craw, and during the time her mate played with the dog, she flew backwards and forwards to their nest so that when the playful one returned home hungry he would find a store of food to appease his appetite.

And as the days passed by and the period of the long night drew near, the two ravens and the dog became almost constant companions.

It wanted but three weeks to Christmas when Krecka was awakened by the sound of distant voices and the snorting of horses. In the grey morning light he saw silhouetted on the summit of the hill the figures of horsemen and the bustling shapes of hounds eager for the hunt.

He roused Recka as she slept with her head beneath her wing, and as they both peered over the edge of the nest they saw Reynard of the split ear leave his earth. For a moment the fox stood apprehensive, his keen ears telling him that men and hounds were near, and his nose, testing the wind currents, gave him the direction they were travelling.

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In a moment he had gone, vanishing like a shadow, a fresh fox who knew all the wiles of men and hounds and one who possessed woodcraft to an extraordinary degree and felt confident in his ability to shake off any who attempted to pursue him.

He was quite content to dwell in the Badger's kitchen, and had formed a quick decision to lead the hunt miles away from his earth, knowing well that it would be warm and snug during the winter.

Greatheart too heard the sound of men and dogs, but did not go out of his lair to investigate. The hunt meant nothing to him, and he most certainly had no desire to meet man whom he now distrusted.

Krecka, who thought the dog a member of the fox family, sought him out to warn him of impending danger. The raven sat on a nearby tree and continually called to Greatheart, but when the dog refused to leave his home amidst the rocks, Krecka flew back to his mate and chattered to her as if stating how foolish the Shepherd Dog was to stay at home when the horsemen were about.

For quite a while the two ravens appeared to be discussing the matter, and then hearing the sound of the huntsman's horn, both set off to see how Reynard fared, thus betraying the track he had taken to the look-out man on the summit of the hill.

The M.F.H. caught a nod from the look-out man and a moment later a long, winding note floated over the hills. It said plainly as only a bugle note can that the fox had "Gone Away". The Whip lightly touched his horse with his heels, and began to speak sharply to those hounds who appeared uninterested in the proceedings. Then the pack commenced to move off, and almost at once a distant "Halloo" was heard. The air was cold and keen and the shout carried. Down in the valley a man was seen waving frantically. A little to the

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west two ravens were following what appeared to be a set course, swooping every now and again as if to watch something far below them. It had become suddenly very quiet. Not even a hound whimpered. Once a buzzard wailed. The horsemen sat silent and still, staring down at the man in the valley who continued to wave.

Then the M.F.H. gave the order. Without further casting for some trace of the fox, the horsemen and hounds began to descend swiftly towards the valley.

They soon reached and passed the man who had been waving, he having indicated the route taken by Reynard of the split ear. The hounds waved their sterns as they drew deep bays of excitement, running swiftly with their noses to the ground.

It was now obvious that they were following a fresh cast, and a smart young bitch called Daisy took the lead from the elder hounds, thus setting the pace.

The horsemen and hounds passed within a hundred yards of the disused quarry near which Greatheart had his lair.

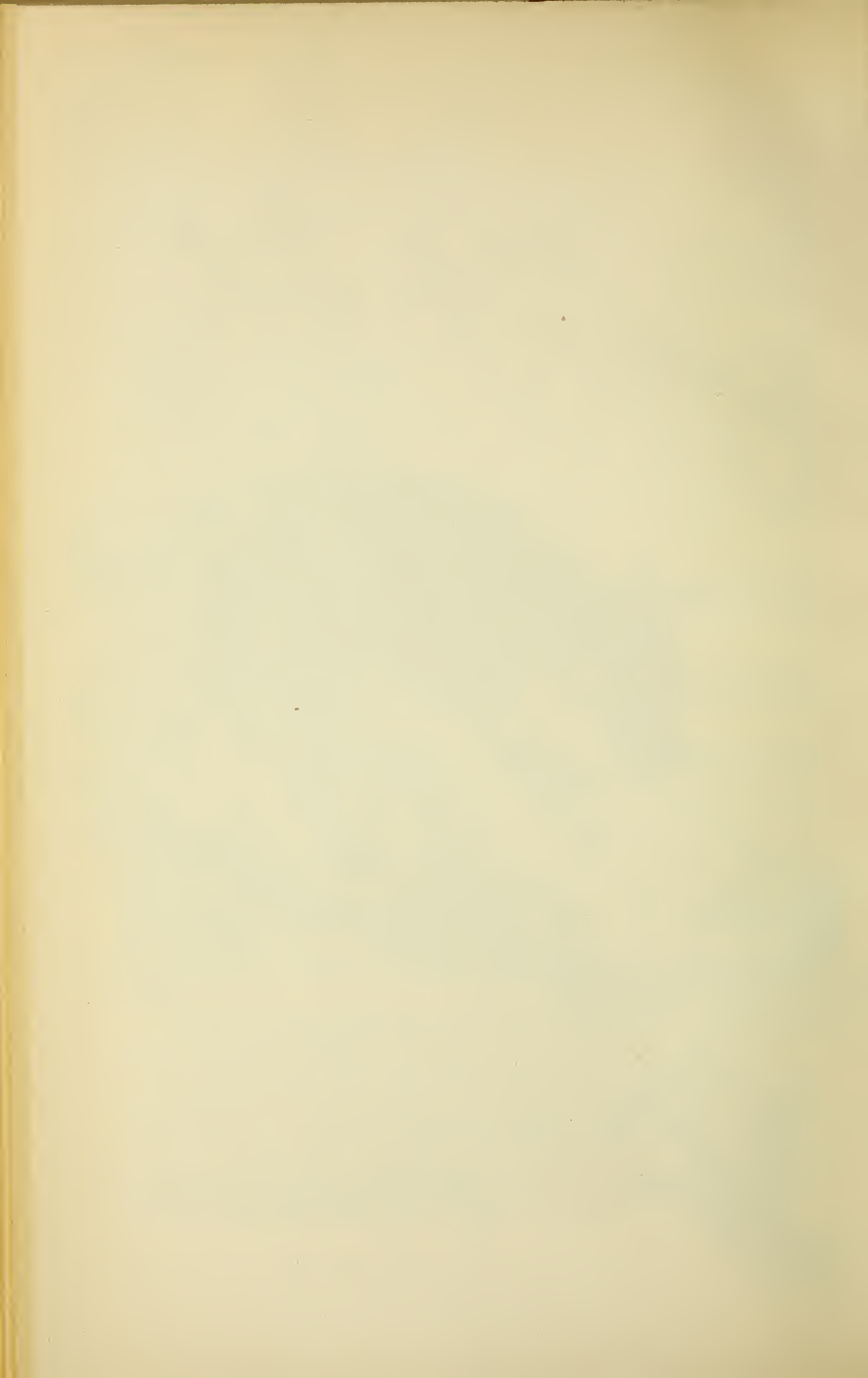
At the sound of thundering feet, the Shepherd Dog crept to the mouth of the den and watched the hunt disappearing in the direction of Stoke Woods and Westbury Beacon. Wondering what all the excitement was about, he began to follow, and by moving quickly was able to keep the sportsmen in sight. Hounds whined and whimpered as they ran. Horses snorted when they encountered obstacles over which they were expected to jump.

Suddenly Daisy wheeled sharp right and made for a deep acclivity, then stopped as if puzzled.

Reynard of the split ear had gone that way, and knowing that the broken ground would hold but little of his scent, made it even more difficult for the hounds by leaping rather than running over the stony formation of the hill. He had not even paused a moment on reaching



"The rabbits were too quick for him"



the summit, but made instantly for a drain that years before had been made to keep an old quarry free from floodwater. The drain, despite its age, was fairly clear of debris and the fox had little difficulty in struggling through it. When he emerged at the other end, he was within sight of the Stoke Woods where he turned east, doubling back the way he had come, and crossing his own trail a mile or so away.

For most of the time he had been running tirelessly, filled with complete confidence in his ability to escape the fleetest of hounds.

He loped up a steep incline, slipped through a mass of furze and young alders, continued on for half a mile or so and then began to feel just a little weary. His heart was thumping and to ease it a little he lay out full length beneath some withered ferns, finally turning over until his hind legs were stretched out, giving him instant relief from the tiredness he felt in his joints.

For a few brief moments he was aware of the quietness that had settled over the countryside. He could hear no sound of pursuit and knew that he had again tricked the hounds. He heard the wind sighing through a spinney in the valley, heard too the sudden bickering of a pair of magpies, then the prolonged peal of the huntsman's horn, seeming to come from a long way off, gave him the information he sought. Having escaped from more than a hundred hunts, he knew the sound of the "Gone to Earth" when he heard it. His tongue lolled out as if he were laughing at the discomfiture of the hounds he had eluded.

Suddenly the two ravens who nested in the tree above his earth circled overhead and began to call out to him. There was something in their cries that warned him of some impending danger.

He jumped to his feet, and as he stood on the alert, staring from left to right, he saw, coming up from the

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valley four couples of hounds who had become separated from the main pack. They were closely pursued by a solitary horseman, who began to crack his whip when they showed signs of breaking formation.

Reynard of the split ear panted with sudden distress. His cleverness had availed him nothing. Never in his life before had he encountered stragglers from the main pack, and for a moment he became conscious of defeat.

Then a loping shape far in the rear of the horseman caught his attention. It was Greatheart!

The instant he saw the dog, a cunning idea came to him. With brush held high, he ran off in a wide semi-circle and knew by the loud baying of the hounds that he had been seen.

The rider commenced to urge on the hounds, but Reynard still had his last trick to play.

He turned sharply and like a flash crossed the horseman's rear bringing the hounds headlong towards Greatheart. This achieved, Reynard slipped off into a wood, and no sooner had he done so than he heard a wild snarling and snapping of dogs, and a man shouting angrily.

Greatheart had been following intently the straying hounds and the horseman, and was startled when the fox crossed his path but a few yards ahead. Then all he knew was that the hounds were bearing down upon him, and that the horseman had swung his mount around and appeared to be urging on the dogs to the attack.

Lightning, the foremost hound, saw Greatheart standing directly in his path, and forgetting the fox instantly raced in to attack. The hound never really understood what happened next.

Greatheart met him shoulder to shoulder, and the hound was flung on to his side. The remainder of the pack immediately joined in, and were soon fighting

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amongst themselves until the horseman dismounted and tried to separate them.

The Shepherd Dog on account of his superior strength soon segregated himself from the hounds, and backed slowly away while the others continued to fight amongst themselves.

By the time the sportsman had got the hounds under control, Greatheart was loping swiftly back to his lair. His shoulder troubled him as he ran, otherwise he was little worse for his adventure.

But at the back of his canine mind existed the thought that he, like Reynard, was liable to be hunted by man and his hounds.

He was approaching the quarry when he saw Reynard of the split ear creeping up towards the wood.

The fox stopped and stared at the dog.

One look of recognition passed from one to the other, Reynard having conveniently forgotten that he was responsible for the hounds turning on the dog. They knew instinctively that they both were the enemy of man, and each passed on his way conscious that they were of a brotherhood—the brotherhood of the wild that accepted but one law—that of survival of the fittest.

It was almost as if they were blood brothers!

CHAPTER SIX

THAT night was the night of the great blizzard. An hour or so before midnight the temperature had fallen much below the average for the time of year, and with it there came from the north-east a rising wind that carried with it a lashing sting. It soon skimmed the moorland pools with layers of thickening ice, and caused the trees in the woods to groan as their sapless roots found no ease in the hard ground to relieve the strain that was being put upon them. The wind blew strongly for a while then, as if exhausting the stress of its own fury, it dropped suddenly, and almost at once came the first of the snow.

And with it approached the days of famine that brought death to many wild things.

At first, it was but a thin layer of snow that fell; then the wind rose once more, and as the temperature dropped yet another few degrees below zero, the snow began to fall in large flakes that soon blanketed the world in a white silence that rested glimmering under a starless sky.

All nocturnal creatures sought shelter according to their way of life and instinct. Rabbits, ever communal in their habits, crouched together in their burrows, whilst hares shivered in their "forms", many so soon to die from exposure. Most foxes had already found comfortable windfalls and earths. Birds, excepting owls who were a tenth part body and the remaining nine-tenths feathers, found such shelter as was available in the leafless woods. For sheep and cattle the blizzard brought the greatest hardship. Many of them lay with their backs to the driving snow, the sheep quickly to be buried in the great drifts that swept down from the hills, the cattle to find

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their heavy limbs frozen in snow that gradually hardened beneath the pressing weight of their cumbersome bodies.

The blizzard continued throughout the night and all the next day. It slackened for a while towards the dusk of the second day, but as the darkness took complete possession of the countryside, the wind rose again and the snow fell more heavily than ever. Roads became blocked, and great trees fell. On Exmoor some of the coombes held drifts ten to twelve feet deep; on the Mendips many of the valleys told much the same tale.

And in the midst of it all, life struggled tenaciously to exist.

Greatheart kept to his lair while the blizzard continued to rage. He slept most of the time with his nose tucked into his bushy tail, and was scarcely conscious of any discomfort from the cold until hunger took the heat from his body.

He rose, yawned, and stretched himself. It was very dark under the rocks but his eyes soon grew accustomed to the gloom, and he moved slowly forward to the entrance of the lair.

Suddenly he stopped. He sniffed. His ears went forward a little. Then he sniffed again, smelling the snow that was piled up against the outer wall of the cave.

He had to dig his way out, and when he finally emerged, he stood in the darkness of the second night of the blizzard and could see little save the whirling flakes of snow. He could not understand it, having witnessed nothing like it before. As the snow began to settle on his back, he shook himself, while something of his wild ancestors exulted within him and made him long to race out into the night.

But Greatheart was hungry. He was all dog—not a wolf like those from whom, centuries before, he and his kind had sprung. Thus the exultation died away and his thoughts turned to satisfying his present requirements.

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He turned back and commenced to dig under one of the rocks where, dog-like, he had but a few days before buried the half-eaten remains of a couple of rabbits and a very old woodcock.

The meat was frozen when he came to it, but he was so hungry that he did not heed its toughness, and ate what was left of the rabbits. In case of emergency, however, he reburied the woodcock.

Then he stood for a few minutes listening. The whole world seemed curiously silent. Then he was once more excitingly aware of the gentle falling of the snow. He pointed his nose to the skies and was about to utter a long-drawn howl when he tasted the snow on his tongue. The howl died in his throat. His eyes gleamed. The flakes melted with a strange burning sensation on his lips. They were so different from the hardened crystal mass that had covered the hiding-place of the rabbits and the woodcock. Again and yet again did he lick the snowflakes that attempted to settle on his nose. He was vastly intrigued by the mystery of their touch upon him.

At last he crawled back into his lair where, now his hunger was appeased, he again curled up into a ball and fell asleep.

Next day the wind dropped, and whilst the sky was still leaden and grey, towards noon the snow ceased to fall. During the greater part of the afternoon the air was still. So cold was the upper atmosphere that it acted as a sound-board, and distant sounds were magnified and carried a great distance. Pistol-like reports came from those trees which tried to break the iron bonds that held enslaved their massive limbs. Thus began the period of the great frost. The fresh snow hardened into a thick crust, and whilst the daylight appeared to struggle bravely to relieve the gloom, it was not of long duration, for the shortest day and the longest night were near at hand.



"His ears pricked as he surveyed the raven"



GREATHEART

On the fourth day the whole earth was frost-bound. Along the ridges of the hills the frozen snow glistened and shone, and what roads were visible in the valleys resembled long strips of glass. Where the embankment of the main railway line marked the track's level course, telegraph wires lay in a tangled mass, and trains to the West of England were seriously delayed.

It was about noon when Greatheart emerged once more from his lair. He was ravenous, and when he had dug up and eaten what remained of the woodcock, he descended cautiously to the valley, bent on serious hunting.

But in all the great white wilderness nothing living could be seen. Even the birds were roosting quietly in their nests, and in a copse where, before the blizzard, rabbits had been most plentiful, everything seemed dead and very, very still.

Greatheart whined. He was hungry, and sensed that the days of famine had come.

All that afternoon and well into the wintry dusk did the dog hunt in vain. He was now getting desperate, for he had not had a substantial meal for many hours. His eyes were bloodshot from the glare of the snow, and hollows above his flanks did but serve to emphasize the leanness of his body and the fast waning strength of his limbs. The frozen flesh of the woodcock had only increased his need for food, and when later the first stars since the blizzard gleamed with a metallic sharpness in the sky, Greatheart stopped in his useless quest and stood shivering. He was exceedingly weary. He panted with exhaustion, and his breath was a thin vapour that clung to the edges of his jaws and formed into a thin skein of ice.

After a few minutes the dog slunk off to his lair, his bushy tail drooping between his legs, and limping

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slightly because of the snow that had frozen hard between his toes.

Only Reynard of the split ear saw him pass by, and like Greatheart, the fox too was hungry, having found that hens had been safely cooped away and access to the runs was difficult on account of dogs which prowled sullenly around the confines of almost deserted farmsteads.

Greatheart slept uneasily that night. The heat in his body diminished as a slow starvation weakened his powers of resistance.

Dawn the next day found him up and about. The sun rose like a many coloured ball in the east, but it did not possess sufficient warmth to thaw the great frost.

Reynard stood a little way off watching the dog, having long since realized that of the two Greatheart was the most persistent hunter.

Krecka the raven, and his mate Recka, alighted on a tree near the lair. They too were hungry, and made no sound as they remained perched on a gnarled branch. Like the fox they respected Greatheart's prowess as a hunter, and were anxious to see what he would do now that the days of famine had come to all wild creatures. A robin whistled plaintively while they sat waiting.

But Greatheart, conscious of nothing save an acute discomfort due to hunger, sniffed around the rocks that protected the lair. He soon lost interest; there were no scents in the vicinity to rouse him. The frozen snow had destroyed all trace of living things that had once passed that way.

The dog raised his head and stared with reddened eyes across the almost featureless landscape.

Suddenly his body became taut. Down in the valley he heard the distressed bleating of a sheep. He tested the wind currents. Again did he hear the calling of the sheep, and a new look came into his eyes.

For an instant longer he hesitated, listening.

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Then he started to lope off downhill, travelling in the direction of the sound. Reynard watched his departure. When the dog had reached the foot of the hill, the fox entered the lair, hoping to steal any food Greatheart might have cached.

Both Krecka and Recka shrieked out when they witnessed Reynard's treacherous action, but Greatheart was too far away to heed their cries.

He soon reached the field in which the sheep was. He found the animal crouched under a snow-laden hedge. The ewe had been overlooked when others of the flock had been hastily driven into pens.

She was much distressed and weakened because she had not eaten for four days, having lain almost hidden in a hollow since the blizzard began.

Greatheart halted within a few yards of the ewe. The smell of the warm flesh tickled his nostrils. His waning strength was stimulated by the sudden desire to kill. Despite the fact that the sheep was the property of man whom he hated, the dog recognized but one law—the survival of the fittest. If he as an individual were to survive, he must eat, and to eat in times of necessity he must kill.

For a few minutes he circled around the ewe, each time lessening the distance between them.

With the curiosity of her kind, mingled with fear, the sheep watched him. She knew dogs for what they were—the helpmates and companions of man. She had been rounded-up by such animals on numerous occasions. Although they had somewhat frightened her, they had never done her any injury. She therefore did not expect to be harmed by Greatheart.

But when the dog came nearer and ever nearer, panic suddenly took possession of her, and almost instinctively she lowered her head. The dog interpreted this action as a sign that the ewe was prepared to fight for her life.

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With a sharp yelp Greatheart darted forward.

The ewe plunged, slipping on the frozen snow. She struggled to regain her balance and in so doing lifted her head, leaving her throat unprotected.

This was the error that made the ewe an easy prey to Greatheart's instinctive method of attack. Like a leader of the wolf-packs of old, he leaped. His jaws clicked together as his fangs sank deep in the jugular.

When the sheep lay still at his feet and the last quiver of life had left her body, the dog sat back on his haunches, and pointing his nose to the skies did what so many of his ancestors had done before him—gave forth what might have been the savage wolf-cry.

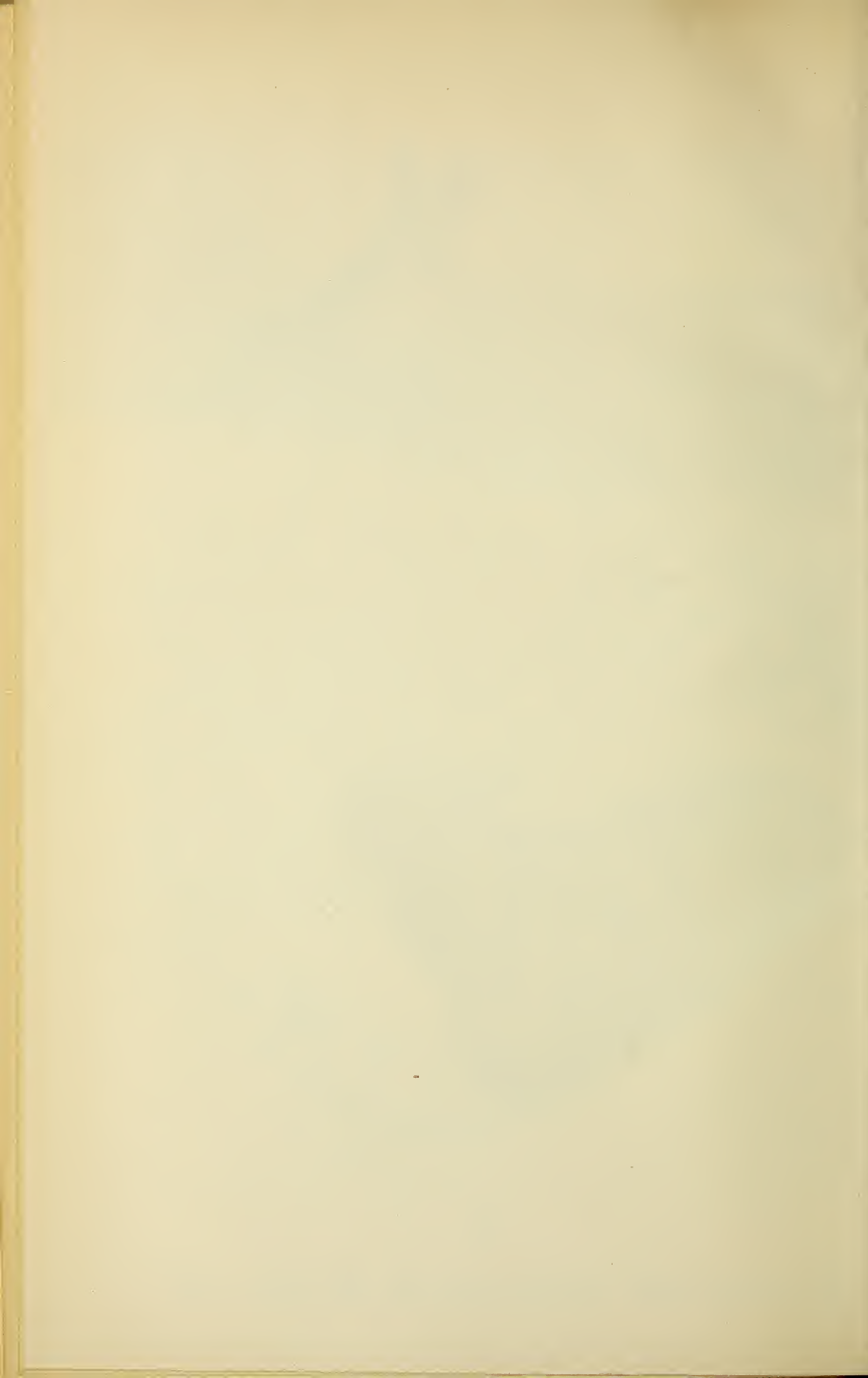
Mournful, yet resonant, the cry floated over the frozen wilderness as Greatheart proclaimed his right to the kill he had made, and it was as if the instinct of the wild was already his acknowledged Master.

Reynard of the split ear heard the call, as did Krecka and Recka. Brock, the Badger, who lay curled up in his dee psubterranean kitchen some hundred yards away, also heard it. All four recognized it as the feasting call of one who was the greatest of hunters and who, while proclaiming his undisputed right to that which he had slain, yet gave to all starving creatures the knowledge that they too could eat if they wished.

They knew at once that the famine had been broken.



"His waning strength was stimulated by the sudden desire to kill"



CHAPTER SEVEN

LATER that same week came the great thaw. The temperature rose; a pale sun shone in an almost colourless sky. In the Vale of Avalon, floods covered fields that had been a desolation of untrodden snow. A herd of cranes gathered in the meadow where Greatheart had slain the sheep, and not a great distance away two swans took possession of a swamp that had temporarily become a lake.

Greatheart heard the steady drip-drip of the thawing snow as he lay in his lair. He knew at once that in less than a day the white world he had known and in which he almost perished from starvation, would have disappeared, and that once again he would see the green of the grass, and the trees grey and tall against the sky instead of just white sentinels clothed in garments of icy splendour.

He lay listening for an hour or more, then tiring of inactivity left the lair. His two companions Krecka and Recka were waiting for him. They knew that if it had not been for him, they would probably have died from starvation, and now that he had gone in for more ambitious hunting, and permitted many strange animals to take what he no longer required, they were inclined to regard him as a very important neighbour.

For his part, Greatheart, ever a lone hunter since the morning he left the home of man for this existence in the wild, regarded the ravens as very special friends. Through them, he had learnt the art of play; because of the patience they often showed when seeking for food, he had learnt a little of tolerance—something he had never before possessed, and the dog always felt strangely elated when he saw them and was prepared for play.

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And that day, because the snow was fast disappearing, and the meadows assuming their old familiar shapes, he experienced more than ever before the desire to gambol, and he did so like any other dog, while Krecka and his mate circled overhead, uttering gruff cries of approval and often swooping low over his back as if to urge him on. For them, Greatheart's joyous mood signified the end of the days of hardship, and they too were happy.

It was soon after the thaw that many local farmers found ravaged carcasses of sheep that had been overlooked when the first snow fell. From examination, it was clear that they had been killed by some large animal, and since from the pad marks in the boggy earth they guessed the "killer" to be a dog, watch was kept over flocks, and men went about armed with guns in readiness to check for ever the activities of the sheep worrier.

But Greatheart was cunning. Knowing that he was molesting that which belonged to man, he invariably killed under the cover of darkness, and within three weeks, handbills were posted up in the nearby villages and towns, offering a reward of twenty pounds for the dog's capture, dead or alive!

Greatheart might have escaped discovery but for Reynard of the split ear. The fox had grown indescribably lazy since he found that by watching closely the dog's activities, he could take his fill of mutton without the effort of having to hunt for himself. Not that Greatheart continually molested the flocks. He only did so when other forms of hunting proved difficult. But whenever he did, Reynard of the split ear was much in evidence, and as the lambing season had commenced and closer watch was being kept on scattered flocks, Reynard it was who fell under suspicion, having been disturbed by a shepherd as he was tugging at the entrails

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of a ewe Greatheart had slain but a couple of hours before.

The sheep lay where the dog had attacked it—under the lee of a hedge of hazel and thorn, and the fox was so intent on his task that he failed to hear the stealthy approach of the shepherd.

When he looked up, his jaws bloody and panting, the man was almost upon him. In a flash he was away, but not before the shepherd had noted his size and particularly the split ear.

Next day, some thirty or forty horsemen gathered in the vicinity of Westbury Beacon, and the usual pack of hounds had been supplemented by some stag-hounds and a few couples of basset-hounds.

It was a mild day, with clouds drifting across the sky, clouds which, scarcely half an hour before, had been brushing the heights of the far Exmoor hills.

A mineral train passed slowly through Lodge Hill Station, and the horsemen forgot for a moment their sport, and idly watched its progress, while the hounds sat about, some scratching and licking themselves, and others—the youngsters not long out of their puppyhood—attempting to play.

At last the M.F.H. decided it was time to set off for the locality where Reynard had been seen. With clanking bits, the horses, some fresh to hunting procedure, began to prance down the slope of the beacon. Men chatted and laughed, and the hounds ran closely behind, all with waving sterns and expressing keenness for the day's sport. Once or twice the Whip had difficulty in keeping them in order, for excitement gleamed in the brightness of their eyes and betrayed itself in the eagerness of their pattering feet.

The meet reached the cross-roads above Westclose Hill, and then made for Rodney Stoke, and the woods that lay to the south.

GREATHEART

It might have been a day in spring so warm was the sun. The hills in the west were clearly defined, those lying well back towards Exmoor seeming like faint clouds on an irregular skyline. The Mendips rose sharp like a mountain ridge in the direction of Wells, and towards Glastonbury were sinking into the lower foot-hills around Castle Cary and the Wiltshire border.

Reynard was to make his greatest run that afternoon.

He broke cover about a mile from the spot where he had a temporary refuge, and took the down grade from the wood. Leaping a high boundary wall, he then made for the valley.

A distant halloaing told him that he had been discovered, but he did not increase his pace, reserving his best efforts until later when he sensed the hunt would be much closer on his trail.

Reaching a shallow depression, he rested for a few seconds, his ears pricked as he listened for signs of the pursuit. At last he heard them—the distant baying of hounds and the thud of horses' hooves.

He clambered out of the hollow, and headed south-east in the direction of an old hardwood forest, intending later to turn due north when the opportunity presented itself. He crossed a ploughed field. A crow saw him and shrieked out in anger as if rudely disturbed from some illicit adventure.

Reynard clicked his teeth in a menacing manner, then gave a sharp backward glance. The hounds and followers were a little over a quarter of a mile away, and had reached level country where the going would be less strenuous. Since he could hear very little, the fox guessed that the hounds were running mute—a dangerous sign. It was now very obvious to Reynard that his scent was clinging to the ground, and the hounds had little difficulty in following it.

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The breeze, blowing against him, ruffled his splendid dark-red coat.

Suddenly he stopped, sounding the wind-currents. The breeze had told him that it was dangerous to travel longer in a south-easterly direction. Apart from his scent clinging to the ground, it was being borne to the hounds by the wind against which he was running.

Reynard, versed in the warnings of Nature, thus turned sharply half-left, and began to lope swiftly, his brush held stiffly behind him.

He had long since regained his second wind, but being so far from woodland covering, he was fast losing confidence in himself. Moreover, every likely drain and holt seemed closed to him. But he was very determined. He knew full well that his life depended on the skill and cunning he exercised.

When the hunt was less than a quarter of a mile away, he leaped a boundary wall and followed its course for a considerable distance, jumping adjoining hedges only when it was absolutely necessary. This strategy puzzled the hounds, but it was not long before they again picked up his trail, having been led back to it by an otter-hound who, on many another occasion, had picked up the scent of the animal she was hunting when it had adopted much the same course as Reynard.

It was now growing late in the afternoon, and Reynard was tiring. Then Yellow Muzzle—a stag-hound from Exmoor—sighted him. The otter-hound who had decided the final line of pursuit was close on Yellow Muzzle's heels, and Reynard found himself running as he had never ran before.

A thorn worked into the pad of his left fore-foot, but he did not stop to get it out. He limped on, still running fairly swiftly.

The sun went down behind the distant western hills, and the Quantocks stood out in a sharply defined

GREATHEART

silhouette—almost like a protective barrier guarding the mighty bastions of Exmoor that lay to the west.

It was almost twilight when Reynard of the split ear made his last attempt to shake off the hounds. He had just roused a much frightened year-old member of the Sekooshoo family, and immediately recalled the trick he had once so successfully played on Greatheart. But before he could repeat this cunning ruse and make the hare a hunted animal, he heard the sudden baying music of the hounds. Badly startled at the sound, and still thinking of the dog Greatheart, he instinctively headed direct across the plain, making for the hill where the animal had his lair.

The fox was terribly weary. He knew that if he did not soon find a refuge, he would become an easy prey to the hounds who were now running so closely behind.

Regardless of his thumping heart, he put forth his best effort that day. He ran—no longer limping—straight as an arrow to the hill and the wood that lay but half a mile away. Such a burst of speed he had never before expended in an endeavour to save his life. He was no longer aware of running simply to escape the hounds. It was almost as though his body had ceased to exist. He ran and ran—his brush stiff behind him—his ears flat against his skull. . . . He continued straight on without the slightest deviation in his course . . . running faster and faster.

The horsemen had difficulty in keeping him in sight. They guessed he was hoping to find shelter in the distant woods. The hounds were rapidly falling behind . . . visibly tiring of the pace set by the hunted fox. It seemed that Reynard would escape them after all.

And the twilight deepened in the woods and began to creep over the valleys. The evening star was already out. A crescent moon was rising in the east and a silence—fraught almost with tenseness—descended upon the

GREATHEART

countryside through which a fox ran for his life and the hounds ran mute.

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Greatheart was returning to his home amidst the rocks when he saw the fox running swiftly up the hill. The dog climbed to the summit of the cairn the better to witness the reason for Reynard's almost dramatic ascent. He glimpsed the hounds and the horsemen, but gave them a mere momentary thought, and returned his gaze to the fox.

The hunted animal neither stumbled nor faltered as he climbed the acclivity leading to the lair. He came straight on, his brush still stiff behind him and his ears flat against his lean skull. It seemed that his snarl of defiance was fixed as if in conformity with his running.

Greatheart felt a strange quiver of fear pass through him. He did not move as Reynard ran straight to the lair. The dog was as a statue graven on the summit of the rocks.

When within a few yards of the rocky outcrop, the fox broke his burst of speed and, for the first time, he faltered, stumbled a little, and then, directly below the rocks on which Greatheart was standing, he remained curiously still

Greatheart watched for almost half a minute.

Reynard of the split ear never moved. He stared straight at the entrance to the lair. The fixed snarl on his mask became smoothed away as his jaws lolled open and a red tongue protruded. Then slowly, very slowly, his brush drooped until it hung between his legs.

The dog was almost as still as the fox. Suddenly Reynard fell stiffly on to his side—muscles set and heart burst. . . . He had made his last run and had again cheated his pursuers.

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And when the followers and their hounds came on the scene, all they saw was the fox seemingly frozen in death, while standing on the cairn, a Shepherd Dog, magnificent in immobility, with ears set on a broad skull, and eyes that gleamed in an exceedingly intelligent face.

Then before either the hounds or the men could make a move, the dog had gone, leaping suddenly from the rocks and streaking away into the wood that was already a darkened mass on the summit of the hill.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN that short moment when he stood staring down at the dead fox which the hounds were fearful to rend apart, and the horsemen who had followed them, Greatheart knew at once that his safety was threatened. The decision to escape came swiftly, and so sudden was his departure from the scene that he heard no outcry as he sped towards the wood.

He slept that night curled up under a clump of thorn bushes. It was cold, and towards morning a fine rain began to fall.

Greatheart shivered as he slept, and once or twice he dreamt of Reynard of the split ear, and each time he saw the fox standing motionless before him—exactly as he had stood at the entrance to the lair—with the fixed snarl on his mask that was smoothed away as his jaws opened, and his tongue lolled out. Even in his sleep Greatheart knew that death had overtaken Reynard—the same death that had claimed the life of Sekooshoo that day when he found her sunk in exhaustion beneath the tree in the field of stubble.

Dawn that morning came in an angry glow of colour. Long, ragged banners of misty cloud hung in the east. It had ceased to rain, but the atmosphere was very damp. Just before sunrise, the glow became blood-red and the wisps of streaming cloud changed first to pink and then to a darkening purple.

Suddenly a raven's hoarse croak penetrated the dog's sleep. Krecka was perched on a branch just above his head. The bird seemed much agitated.

As Greatheart roused himself, Krecka was joined by his mate, and both began to chatter to the dog in what seemed urgent tones.

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Then Greatheart's keen ears caught the sound of a distant whistle. In a moment he jumped to his feet and, watched by the ravens, crept stealthily through the trees towards the lair.

At the edge of the wood he paused. Approaching the cairn of rocks from all sides was a company of men with dogs. He noticed that they appeared to carry strange-looking sticks over their shoulders—sticks that gleamed in the ever-increasing light of a wild dawn.

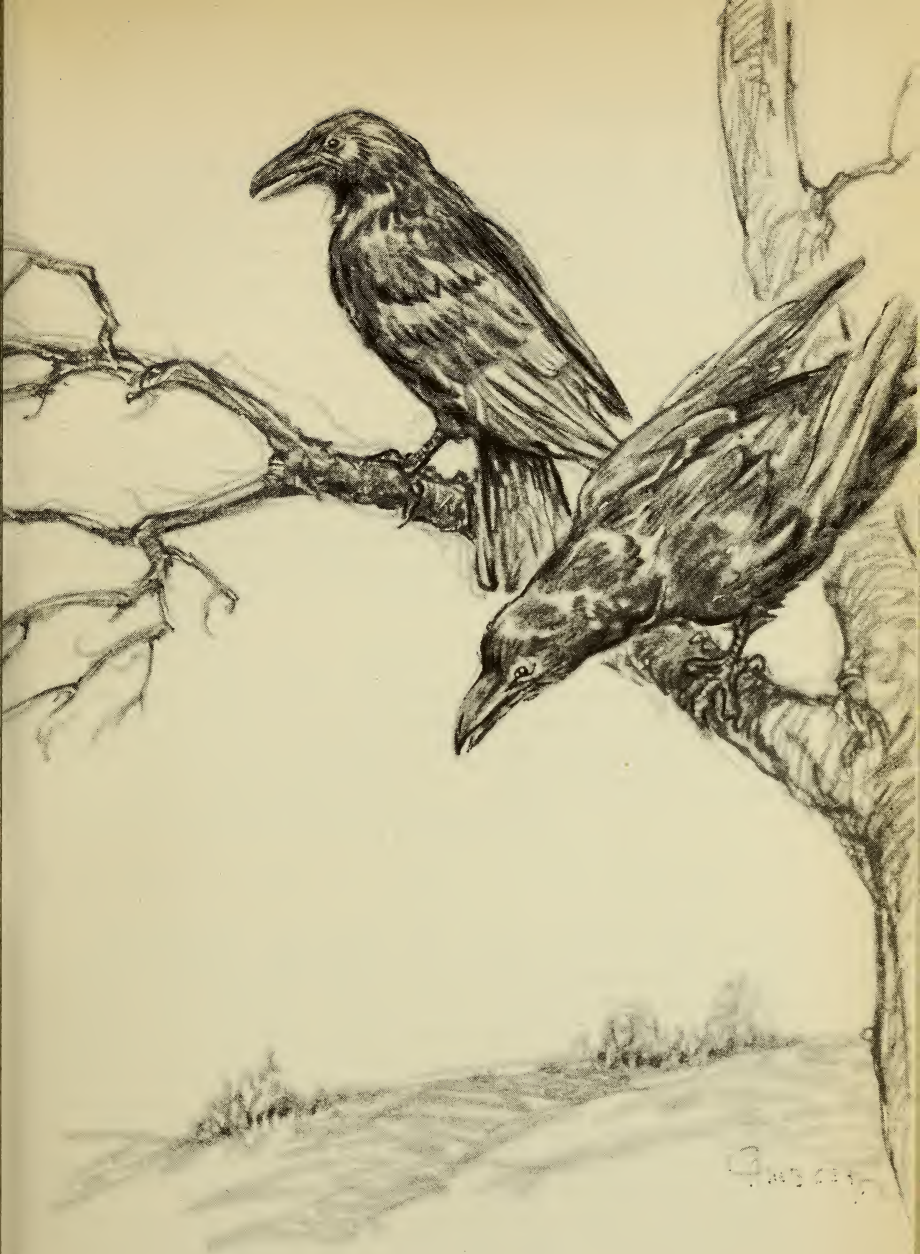
Instinct warned him that it was he they were now intent on hunting, and the sticks they carried were those which spat fire. He had once witnessed the use of one of these sticks when, from a safe distance, he had seen a man shooting at birds which fell to the ground when the fire was seen. Greatheart had no illusions as to the miracle-making possibilities of man, and he turned away at once, seeking the gloom of the wood, loping slowly to the spot where he had slept the night.

Krecka and Recka, who had followed the dog to the edge of the wood, flew back again to the perch above the thorn bush. Greatheart looked up at them. They uttered low cries and fluttered their wings.

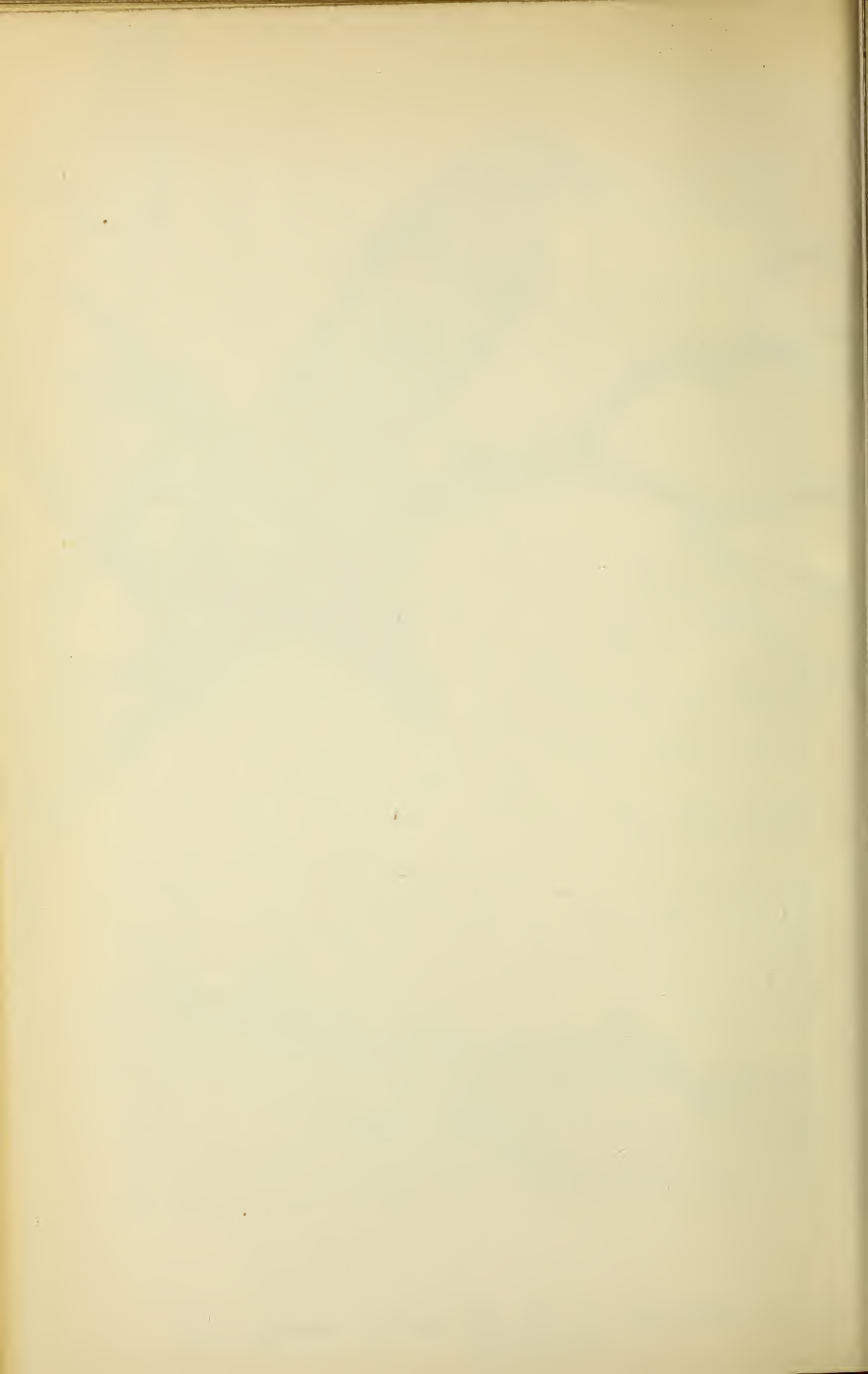
The dog interpreted correctly what they were endeavouring to tell him. They too knew that it was now Greatheart who was being hunted.

For the space of ten seconds or more the Shepherd Dog stood listening. He could hear distinctly now the sound of human voices, and guessed he must not tarry any longer. He prepared to leave, and then was conscious of the ravens gravely watching him. They were silent and motionless on their precarious perch.

Greatheart stood up on his hind legs, his forepaws gripping the tree-stem beneath them. He sniffed, but could not reach the birds. They just looked down on him, their dark eyes gleaming with understanding. This, they knew, was the dog's farewell greeting to them.



'They just looked down on him, their dark eyes gleaming with understanding'



GREATHEART

An instant later, Greatheart set off on the journey he must make to save his life, moving like a shadow through the wood, and travelling in a westerly direction.

Both Krecka and Recka sensed that never again would they see Greatheart—the mightiest of hunters whom man now sought to destroy. . . .

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The sound of human voices drew gradually nearer; there was a snapping of twigs trodden underfoot. Then the foremost hunter appeared, holding on a leash a massive, yet lean-legged lurcher.

The two ravens flew away with a gentle whirring of their wings, going in a direction opposite to that taken by the dog.

When the man reached the place where Greatheart had slept and dreamed of Reynard of the split ear, all he saw was the clump of thorn bushes and a skein of dark hair caught and held by a broken branch. And above the skein of hair, a black feather that still fluttered as if moved by a ripple of life. . . .

* * * * *

Greatheart managed to escape from the wood without being seen by his intended pursuers. He crept across the narrow track that meandered along the summit of the hill, and then stood for a few seconds under the protection of an over-grown hedge of thorn and hazel.

The dog was in a hesitant mood. He was undecided as to the direction he should take. Then a vague picture of a hill rising out of the plain began to tease his mind. That hill lay in the west, and he had often seen long-winged birds flying to it in the path of the setting sun.

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He turned to look for the sun, but it was obscured by a sullen mass of cloud that had gathered since dawn. The flaming ball of fire that had so often warmed him, was no guide that morning. Besides he knew that it rose in a direction opposite to that usually taken by the silent, long-winged birds. He accordingly turned westward, and exercising caution loped off on his journey.

His main desire was to get well away from the wood, and when once this was accomplished he became less conscious of the instinctive urge to hurry.

The dog made leisurely progress for some time, skirting the few houses he came upon by making a detour across the fields. It was during one of these attempts to avoid human habitations that he heard the sound of horsemen.

They were approaching along the road he had just left, and he crouched low on his stomach until he was almost hidden in the long grass. The horsemen, with hounds in attendance, passed on, unaware that the animal they sought lay hidden scarcely a hundred yards away.

Luck favoured Greatheart. The M.F.H. was the instrument selected for the dog's preservation. He had made an unwise decision when, the previous evening, he had suggested the dog should be hunted the following morning. He had hoped that since the hounds had not molested him, Greatheart would return to the lair to sleep, and thus prove an easy capture. The reasons he gave for this decision were, after all, quite logical; the one he did not mention was a matter of conscience. The man disliked the idea of turning the hounds on one of their own species, and he considered that a couple of men could tackle the dog when he emerged from the lair.

The hounds, he said, by way of explanation, were weary after the run Reynard had given them, and in

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addition would not prove very successful in trailing a dog when they considered their legitimate quarry was a fox. Moreover, as he did not fail to point out, the Shepherd Dog was fresh for a twenty-mile run if the need arose, and would, by reason of his superior strength, outrun even the fleetest of the hounds.

But the Master of Foxhounds had not reckoned on the instinctive wisdom of those who dwelt in the wild. Having no knowledge of Greatheart's relationship with other creatures who inhabited the wood, it was impossible to have considered two ravens warning the dog of the approach of an enemy to the lair.

Thus Greatheart was able to travel a great distance from his former haunts before being discovered, and then only by a labourer who, bent on poaching, stood leaning against the parapet of a bridge spanning a stream and saw the dog leap from one bank to the other.

Remembering that there was a reward offered for a sheep killer, and thinking any dog would do—whether guilty or innocent—he brought his gun smartly to his shoulder and fired.

The bullet went singing past the dog, and before the man could reload, Greatheart was running swiftly down-stream, and soon disappeared into a copse that lay to the west of Sedgemoor.

By nightfall, Greatheart had reached the main railway line that ran from Bridgwater to Taunton. He caught and ate with relish a rabbit that had been playing on the embankment, and then rested awhile in a long trough dug with the idea of taking floodwater from the track above.

The noise of an approaching train roused him. It was now very dark. As he stood up, he saw, far up the line, the twinkling lamps of a rapidly moving engine drawing a long array of coaches. The express drew near, the light from the carriage windows throwing oblique

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patterns of golden radiance upon the embankment and upon the telegraph poles which marked the route. The train passed with an escape of steam that caused the dog to flick his ears with sudden nervousness. He then decided to move on, and crossing the track set off once again towards the west, and long before daybreak had reached the foothills of the Quantocks.

In the peacefulness of the early morning he sensed that before him lay new hunting grounds that would require much exploring, and he sought out a secluded spot in which to rest before surveying his new territory.

Thus did Greatheart make the first move towards that which was to be his Destiny. Yet the rising slopes of the Quantocks were but the stepping-stones to that which lay beyond.

The Great Adventure had begun, the days of rebirth were near at hand and Greatheart was travelling westward to greet them.

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Spring—the days of rebirth for all those who lived in the wild—drew near. Tiny red flowers, where the catkins were most prominent, appeared on the hazel bushes. In some parts, despite the hard winter that was past, barren strawberries and primroses began to bloom.

In the woods, the pigeons commenced to utter soft cooing sounds while the rooks began to repair their nests from the ravages of winter, accompanied by the oft-repeated notes of the missel-thrush.

Greatheart, now temporarily resident on an isolated part of the Quantock Hills, felt the call of spring in the subtle quickening of his blood and in the overwhelming desire to travel farther westward.

During the short period he had been in the vicinity

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of the Quantocks, he had lived a very solitary life. Nobody, it seemed, knew that he was in the neighbourhood. Instinctively guessing that he had brought the wrath of man down upon him by reason of his sheep-killing activities, he avoided what flocks there were, and lived mainly on rabbits and other small game, only once robbing man, and then merely the snares of the local poacher.

Then in early March he witnessed a very curious thing. As he came down into one of the low valleys between the hills, he saw Sekooshoo—the Quantock hare—perform a dance with a hare from the Brendons.

Greatheart stood to the windward of them, watching closely their antics. Since witnessing the tragic end of the Mendip Sekooshoo, he had lost the desire to hunt hares. It seemed that whenever he saw one of the Sekooshoo tribe, he heard once again the distressed cry of the hare who so quickly gave up her life under the tree in the field of stubble. That low moan had penetrated deeply into the dog's subconscious mind, and he associated it with his sudden appearance as Sekooshoo rested exhausted after the rigours of the hunt.

And as he did not want to hear the sound again, he kept well away from hares whenever he chanced to meet them, although he knew that they would afford him excellent fun in a chase because of their peculiar habit of running a zig-zag course.

But as he watched that morning, the wind changed, and the two hares got his scent. They instantly ceased their dancing, and flattened their ears against their skulls. In another moment they bent themselves almost double and raced away, and at their departure, Greatheart felt suddenly lonely.

He turned and went back up the hill, loping slowly with his tail between his legs.

Although he was not directly aware of it, he was fast

GREATHEART

becoming in need of companionship. Another of his species might have eased for a while the strange restlessness within him. But his real need was for something he had known but once—and then when a puppy. And that need was for man whom he now hated. Somewhere, at the back of his canine mind, persisted the tormenting memory of somebody with big, clumsy hands . . . somebody who had caressed him and cared for him . . . and it was the advent of spring that increased the longing within him, but it was Sekooshoo who made him responsive to find that which he felt he had lost.

Next day was one of high wind, with the sun shining brilliantly in a sky that was flecked with the most astonishing cloud shapes. Some were like immense galleons putting out to sea, others resembling huge pinioned birds hastening to some secret rendezvous.

The wind had an exhilarating effect on the dog who, little knowing that he was to cover a great distance that day, began to lope westward along the ridge of the hills.

For most of the way, Greatheart kept to a well-defined track—the old ridgeway above Bagborough that clung to the highlands before slipping seaward between the twin villages of Quantoxhead.

The dog deserted the track when within sight of the villages and headed off into one of the moorlike ravines that rose, after a mile or so, towards a spot where moorland and pinewood met. Here, loose grey stones lay half-buried in grass and heather, and there was a deep silence broken only by the rare cry of a high-flying bird and a soft sound among the pines.

At last the dog approached the western slope of the Quantocks which was bare and steep and, towards the coast, rose with a wild riot of colour. Farther westward were wind-swept moorlands, seeming purple and gold in

the distance and scarred in places by old stone quarries.

That night he curled up in a disused stone-mason's hut, but was up and away again before the sun made golden the eastern horizon.

It seemed as if he were spurred on by an impulse within him that was beyond his power to control. Moreover, he had no clear conception as to the exact direction he was going—only that he was travelling due west. The dog was conscious only of sustained pleasure in being for ever on the move, and he covered mile after uphill mile with an ease that was typical of his wolfish ancestors. There was scarcely any effort in his gait, his muscles in complete harmony with the rest of his body.

By the afternoon of the second day he was on the edge of Exmoor. Without a pause, he journeyed into the golden glow of moorland sunlight, not aware of tiredness nor the need for rest.

His energy appeared boundless; his enthusiasm inexhaustible.

He finally found himself on the crest of Cloutsham Ball that lay well in the heart of the moor. As he stood awhile, staring into the colourful radiance of an Exmoor evening, he felt, beneath his feet, the naked earth already becoming warm with spring, and it brought a new sparkle to his eyes and a strange joy to his heart.

That night a dark shadow stood upon the ancient beacon height of Dunkery. The stars were bright above the hills. There was no haze to dim their glory. A night-bird called. Far off, a dog barked. The breeze whispered amidst the whin bushes. Somewhere—from a great distance—came the sound of tumbling water. Then a stag bellowed, and again the dog commenced to bark. Towards dawn, a star fell soundlessly through the dark blue arch of the sky.

But still the shadow on Dunkery stood silent and unmoving, and when the first light of day crept up to

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tint the banners of the dawn, the shadow became a sharply etched silhouette—the silhouette of a dog with pricked ears keenly alert, and eyes that missed nothing of the world about him.

For him, life had become a magnificent adventure.

BOOK TWO

WHERE MANY A CLEAR STREAM FALLS

CHAPTER ONE

ON the moonlit bank, an otter lay listening for the whistle of his mate. The river purled slowly past, singing noisily where pebbles and partially submerged boulders marked its uneven course. The dark shape of a trout swam slowly upstream. With a sudden movement, the otter slipped into the ebbing current and silently hunted the fish. The trout turned and twisted, swam beneath the uplifted base of a stone where he hid with fins scarcely moving. Whistling with disappointment, the otter surfaced, blowing drops of water through his nostrils—drops that fell glistening like silver in the moonlight. Then floating down-stream came the cry of his mate, and he immediately forgot the trout and swam rapidly in the direction of the now repeated call.

Unknown to the otter, his antics had been watched by a wolf-dog, who stood with forefeet firmly placed on the parapet of the grey-stoned bridge near the spot where the otter had lain waiting for the whistle of his mate.

Greatheart had, at first, been suspicious of the otter. He had never before seen an animal like him, and the experience, added to the others he had already encountered on Exmoor, checked for a while his impulse to travel onward.

Spring had brought a new glory to Exmoor, and Greatheart found the wooded hills and coombes much to his liking. The hunting was good, and then he had

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discovered that over at Cloud—near the Somerset-Devon border—dwelt another dog similar to himself.

Greatheart had at first distrusted this other member of the canine race, who was known to everybody on Exmoor as "Storm of Dancerwood". The two met on the sixth day of Greatheart's appearance in the locality.

Storm had been accompanied by his master when he saw, on the crest of the Long Stoke Ridge, a dog closely resembling his sire who had died some two years before. He was filled with curiosity as was his master. Storm, with a quick glance up at his owner, interpreted in the man's eyes his complete approval of anything he might wish to do. He accordingly loped off towards the distant ridge, while his master sat on a boulder and waited.

The dog covered the intervening distance in record time, running with the ease of one who knew every rocky defile and ditch that marked the route he was traversing.

Like Greatheart, Storm had lived in the wild, having been the companion of a blind vixen until she met her death from the hounds of the Doone Pack. Thus, the moorland and the entire reaches along the coast were as familiar to the dog as was the cottage at Cloud where he now lived with his master—a naturalist—who had reclaimed him and made him as fine a companion as anybody could desire. There was a strange bond of understanding between the two, and the naturalist had no misgivings when he saw Storm leaping the water-courses, and approaching steadily nearer to the other dog who stood so silent and still on the distant ridge.

Greatheart, who had been watching a herd of deer grazing on a nearby slope, was not aware that he had been seen by man and that the man's dog was now hastening to give him greeting.

Storm had lost sight of the other dog when he



"A herd of Deer grazing on a nearby slope"



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reached the shoulder of the ridge, and slackened his pace, climbing the hill with caution now that he had almost reached his objective.

When he was but a hundred yards or so away from Greatheart, Storm stopped, sniffed the air currents and set his ears at an inquisitive angle. He heard the distant cries of peewits as they tossed and tumbled in the wind, and for one brief instant he felt a longing to race far over the moor with the strange dog as a companion.

Then he remembered his master, thought too of his home at Cloud, and the fire before which he loved to lie on those nights when the wind blew fiercely from the west, and the rain fell.

He wanted to return at once to that master, but his curiosity concerning the other dog had first to be satisfied, and he went on, pausing only when he stood face to face with Greatheart.

Greatheart was badly startled. The two dogs stared at each other—Storm with his tail waving in friendliness, and Greatheart with his fangs bared in suspicion.

While Storm was ready to play, Greatheart's suspicious nature made him apprehensive. He was well acquainted with creatures of the wild and the hounds who, for the most part, hunted them, but he had never, outside the kennels where he had spent his puppyhood, met another dog so like himself.

Storm's friendliness gradually softened Greatheart's nervous aggressiveness, and when the former sniffed him, he too began to wave his tail. One thing, however, checked any impulse he might have had for play. It was the man-taint. The musk was strong in Greatheart's nostrils, and reminded him of the man who had driven him up the coombe with the whip that had stung his flanks. Yet, somehow much the same scent had belonged to the man with clumsy hands. . . . Greatheart couldn't quite forget that, despite all that had

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happened to him since he had forsaken man for his adventurous life in the wild. . . .

Suddenly Storm pranced away and commenced to race down the slope of the ridge, and after a moment's hesitation, Greatheart began to follow.

Storm of Dancerwood led the way, straight across the shoulder of the Long Stoke Ridge, then along the narrow strip of moorland to where his master still sat waiting.

Suddenly Greatheart became aware that Storm's pace had slackened, and he ran with his head held high. Somebody shouted, and whilst Storm ran on, Greatheart broke the effort he was making. Fear struck through him at the sound of a human voice in a place where he had imagined no human being existed.

Then as he searched the direction from which the sound had come, he saw a man standing on the summit of an incline, saw too how Storm ran straight to him, leaping around with half-excited barks that expressed pleasure.

Greatheart turned to run back the way he had come. The man stood watching him. As Greatheart hesitated, Storm once again left his master and began to return to him. He came now with an excited gleam in his eyes, but Greatheart, conscious of betrayal, wrinkled his lips.

Storm stopped when within a few yards of Greatheart who, having noticed that the man had begun to descend the ridge, commenced to move away. Storm made no attempt to follow; he just stood waiting for his master to join him.

This appeared suspicious to Greatheart. Distrusting the human species, the dog could not understand how Storm had come to accept the friendship of man.

The naturalist came steadily nearer, and whilst Greatheart stood on the defensive, ready to retreat at the first sign of danger, there was something in the other

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dog's attitude that kept him from flight. Storm seemed to have such complete trust in the man who was now within a few yards' distance. He glanced round, and his whole body shook with the frantic waving of his tail.

When he had reached Storm's side, the man stopped, staring straight at Greatheart. He noted Greatheart's magnificent physique; the straight limbs and quivering muscles that told of immense reserves of strength. These things he admired, but deplored that the dog's coat showed no signs of ever having been groomed. Yet despite this, he knew that Greatheart was well bred. His stance denoted an air of superior breeding, and his intelligent face spoke eloquently of an active brain and a cunning that must assuredly out-match that of other creatures who inhabited the wild.

Remembering only too vividly his own dog's many exploits over at Southernwood, the naturalist had little difficulty in constructing the life Greatheart led. It was obvious from his general demeanour that the dog had lost all touch with humanity, and was one who lived entirely on his own resources.

The naturalist dropped to one knee while Storm sat on his haunches beside him, eager to see what his master proposed to do in the case of this very wayward animal who stood so aloof and suspicious before them.

Then the man adopted a course he had once taken with Storm when the dog's companion—the blind vixen—had been slain by the hounds. He spoke to Greatheart in quiet well-modulated tones.

Greatheart, however, was not to be caught thus. There still persisted at the back of his mind the memory of the man with the whip that had whistled through the air and stung his flanks.

He backed away, his eyes never leaving those of the man who knelt watching . . . watching.

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The naturalist realized that Greatheart was not prepared to accept him. Here was a different case from that of Storm. Even during his sojourn in the wild with the blind vixen Freya, Storm had never completely lost touch with man.

Greatheart was obviously different. His contact with man had been a phase too far removed to have any permanent value. There was only one thing left to do—and that was to return home. Perhaps the strange dog would follow.

The naturalist, ever interested in animals, was curious about Greatheart, and longed to learn something of his history even as in the past he had discovered the history of his own dog Storm.

He therefore rose from his kneeling posture, and Storm stood up, watching him.

"It's no good, old fellow," he remarked, patting the dog on the head. "Your new pal won't respond!"

Storm looked back at Greatheart.

A moment later Storm and his master had set off for the cottage at Cloud, and Greatheart watched them go . . . the dog trotting eagerly and with confidence at the heels of a man who was lean and tall, and who walked with a queer slouching movement . . . a man whose face, despite the thinning hair at the temples, seemed somewhat youthful.

Greatheart once again felt unutterably lonely, and knew not the reason. He wanted to follow, but dared not go. His sharpened instincts held him back.

That night, a yellow light streamed through the uncurtained window of the study in the cottage at Cloud. The light was visible from far across the moor, and it was seen by a dog standing alone on a rocky outcrop near Dunkery. It enticed him to investigate, for he knew that it lay in the direction taken by Storm and his master.

He resisted it as long as he could, then trotted off to

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where the twinkling light shone like a beacon across the moorland wastes.

The cottage was farther away than Greatheart had been led to expect. He did not realize that the light could be seen many miles away. An hour had almost slipped by before the dog crossed a gorse-clad coombe and stood in a narrow, rutted lane that led to the cottage.

He then became apprehensive. Man, whom he feared, dwelt here, and he whined softly in his throat before looking back along the track he had travelled. Then he thought of Storm, and the desire to see him again overcame his distrust for the company the animal kept.

Greatheart walked stiff-legged up the lane, pausing for a moment before the gate that marked the boundary of the path that led to the cottage door. Like a flash, he leaped into the garden and an instant later stood before the lighted window.

The rest of the cottage rose up dark before him, and as he sniffed the atmosphere he could scent the wood-smoke from the fire that burned on the hearth of the room into which he was so anxious to peer.

He flicked his ears backwards and forwards from sheer nervousness. Some vague, half-familiar, yet tormenting thought lay at the back of his mind. Here was something he dimly realized he had forsaken in those far-off days when he had taken to the wild.

Silently he reared up on his hind-legs, resting his forepaws on the window-ledge, and with ears erect stared into the room.

He saw that it was a curious room—not at all like the room into which he had once looked and witnessed a woman crooning to her child. The walls of that room had been almost bare, with a large wooden structure in one corner that had held round, white shiny things.

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This room into which he was now staring was not at all bare. The walls were lined with cases that held many coloured oblong shapes that gleamed in places as the light, from the lamp of the table, struck the gilt-lettered bindings that were lost in gloom, but to his eyes were so clearly visible.

Yet he noticed not so much these things as he did the man sunk deep in an arm-chair before the blazing fire, and the dog who lay curled up asleep at his feet.

There was something in the scene that disturbed Greatheart as he stood staring in at the window—something reminiscent of things that had always lurked unprobed in the depths of his animal consciousness. They were impressions gained and stored by his ancestors—impressions that had been transmitted to him—an out-cast of the canine race—who now stood as so many of his legendary blood-brothers had stood, staring into a window at a scene so remote and yet so terribly familiar now that he had glimpsed it.

As he left the window, the loneliness he experienced in his heart was such that it cried for utterance. He pointed his nose to the skies and howled as only a lonely dog can howl when the fires of man have been denied him. . . .

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That had been over a week ago, the last dark night before the mating moon had risen in the east, and now, as Greatheart listened to the distant whistling of the two otters at play, the longing to return once again to the cottage at Cloud proved too strong for him to withstand. Thus, long before the moon had cast the shadow of the bridge upon the gleaming water of the river, the dog was far over the moor, travelling towards the light that still gleamed out across the valley.

CHAPTER TWO

DURING the following week Greatheart spent three nights out of six in the vicinity of Cloud. Even when the light in the cottage window no longer shone, he remained in the coombe near by, hunting, and occasionally returning to the cottage which he encircled after the manner of a wolf returning to some forbidden place that attracted him. Twice he saw Storm and his master striding out across the moor, but fear, tempered with shyness, kept him at a safe distance, and neither saw the dog as he trailed them, keeping to hollows that hid him from view.

Meanwhile, spring had fully established itself in the west. The birches in the valleys were gloriously arrayed in their new jackets of green, and from many a copse the cuckoo called, while magpies and crows squabbled amongst themselves as they set about remedying faults they had found in their recent nest-building activities. The air was warmer and the sky blue most of the day. What clouds there were swept high over the distant tors of Dartmoor, and occasionally drifted northwards to send sunshine and shadow racing in confusion across Dunkery, and the foothills that lay betwixt Cloutsham and the Quantocks. It was a perfect spring, made doubly beautiful because of the hard winter that was past.

But these were the days when otter hunting was being most rigorously pursued. Three or four times during the next few days Greatheart watched, from afar, groups of men and hounds following the river courses.

One morning when he went to a stream to drink, he was surprised to see his old acquaintance—the otter.

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But on this particular occasion the otter was not in a playful mood. He appeared much distressed. Hounds had passed him as he lay quietly in his holt under an old beech tree, and his hiding-place would not have been discovered if it had not been for an over-inquisitive terrier who had sniffed at the entrance to the lair, thus attracting the attention of the Master. At first, Huicie the Younger—so named because he had been sired by Huicie a famous Exmoor otter—felt neither fear nor animosity against the terrier. He just wanted to sleep and dream of his mate. But the terrier would persist in attempting to force an entrance to the holt, and finally Huicie decided to leave by way of another exit, and swam rapidly down-stream, hearing as he did so the baying of the hounds who had picked up his scent. He had only just managed to elude the hounds when he came upon Greatheart.

The otter trod water, and uttered just one sharp cry: "Ic-y-aan." He blew through his nostrils and his beady eyes met those of the dog.

Both Greatheart and Huicie stared at each other for the space of a split second. The water rippled under the otter as he half lifted himself to ride the eddying currents.

Whilst the dog's eyes reflected much surprise, in those of Huicie was a great fear. Broken twigs and sodden leaves drifted past him as he gazed back at Greatheart. A rill of sunlight gleamed before him, and the dark shape of a trout moved easily by the bank. The otter, who should have instinctively noticed these things, was aware of nothing save the dog, and the fear that grew in his heart found reflection in his eyes.

Then movement returned to him. He suddenly sank beneath the water, and a long line of bubbles marked the course he took. As he swam swiftly under a mass of dark, swaying weed, a trout darted by, and he

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caught it with one sharp turn of his body. His courage was returning. The memory of the hounds who were hunting him gradually receded as the joy of swimming took complete possession of his senses.

Half an hour later, the whips and hounds came down the river, but the otter's scent had been carried away by the swiftly running water, and not many minutes had passed before men and dogs returned, and the meet for the day was over.

For the remainder of the week the hounds continued to frequent the locality, and Greatheart, despite the desire he had to visit Cloud, kept to those thickly wooded portions of the moor that lay to the south of Cloutsham.

The moon had now commenced to wane. It was long past mid-April—the time when the swallows come to the West Country. In the deep moorland pools, otter cubs played with the broken reflection of the moon, while the elder members of their kind slept after the exhausting rigours of the day. It seemed to them that never before had the hounds taken such relentless interest in their activities.

Huicie the Younger and his mate, who was known as Soft Ear—because the tip of one ear was slightly tilted instead of firm—had both experienced the terrors of being hunted, and each time they heard the baying of hounds were aware of sudden panic.

Soft Ear was anxious to find some quiet place in which to rear the cubs she would soon bring into the world. She and Huicie had mated late in the season, and the hardship of being constantly hunted was beginning to weaken her powers of resistance.

Thus, on the night when the moon was but a golden dipper in the sky, the two decided to set off on the first stages of the journey they felt they must take to get away from Exmoor and the men and hounds who frequented it.

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They crept out of the holt they had temporarily occupied, and crossing a narrow strip of verge slid silently into a stream that was too shallow to allow for swimming. Some ten minutes later they were traversing a stretch of scrub that led to a coombe in the heart of which was a tarn where frogs were plentiful.

For an hour or more they swam and frolicked in the dark waters of the tarn. Every now and again a bloated frog would fall victim to their skill, and their excited whistles told of the happiness they experienced.

Greatheart found the pair when they had tired of their play and lay dozing on a mossy boulder.

The dog stood on the edge of the tarn, and it was Soft Ear who saw him first. She whimpered with fear, and Huicie, rudely awakened, bared his teeth, ready to fight for the mate who would shortly be the mother of his cubs.

But Greatheart was lonely. He wished the otters no harm. He stood gazing at them in the half-light—his eyes shining like green balls of liquid fire.

The otters, however, knew him only as an enemy, and slid swiftly from the boulder, making for the tarn. When they found that Greatheart was in a tolerant mood, they ignored him, and once again began to play, and after a time the two otters lost most of their fear for the dog, although when they finally waded ashore they kept the width of the tarn between them.

Within a few minutes Huicie had found a fairly secure refuge that went deep under an overhanging crag of rock. By the time the moon had almost travelled its course, they were curled up asleep.

Greatheart, finding himself alone, wandered by the shores of the waveless tarn that was growing deeper and deeper in a tone of blackness that now matched the darkening night.

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The dog sensed that the otters would not put in another appearance that night, and stood listlessly near their hiding-place.

Since his meeting with Storm and the naturalist, the feeling of utter loneliness kept recurring, and where before he had been content to be friendless, he now sought companionship. He thought back dimly to the two ravens, Krecka and Recka. Although Greatheart did not translate it into terms of friendship, he only knew that he was beginning to miss the ravens, and wished he could have them with him now.

Krecka, in particular, had liked chattering to him, and whilst he had never understood what the bird had been saying, he knew that he had enjoyed being spoken to thus.

In the back of his mind he had hoped that perhaps Huicie and Soft Ear would show the same interest, and speak to him, not with derision as they had done, but with an obvious effort at becoming companionable. Greatheart did not realize that he and his kind were looked upon as the enemies of the otter tribe.

Shortly afterwards, he was leaving Wellshead far behind, making for the direction of Ware Ball and Trout Hill. The moon had gone by now, and only the stars lit the path he trod, gleaming brightly in small moorland pools like will-o'-the-wisps seeking to surprise him. He soon reached Ware Ball and began the ascent of Trout Hill, finally running swiftly across South Common as he pressed on towards the Deer Park and the Badgworthy Water.

In a few minutes now he would be at Cloud, and already in his mind's eye was the dark shape of the cottage, girded about by the grey stone wall that was so easy to leap.

The sound of running water was loud in the quietness. Somewhere, not far away, a night-jar called. Away over

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the moor a stag was lifting his voice in a cry to gather in the herd.

Greatheart crossed the Badgworthy Water at a point where stepping-stones made a rough bridge, and in another minute he was racing up the coombe to the lane that led to the cottage.

Having topped the rise he suddenly stopped, and his tail, which till then he had held at an excited angle, drooped until it lay between his legs. In the quietness he could hear the pounding of his heart. . . .

He noticed that there was no light shining in the window. But he was not dejected because of that. He had been to the cottage before when the window had been in darkness, but there had always been the smell of smouldering wood and turf as if the fire within the cottage had been damped down for the night. It was because he could not scent the wood-smoke that he knew that Storm and his master were not at home.

He leaped the wall and walked up to the cottage window. But it was closely shuttered and he guessed that it was useless to try and peer into the room.

The dog sniffed the cracks between the shutters, but the scents he had expected to find were gone. With his nose to the ground, he went slowly around to the cottage door, finding at last some trace of Storm and the naturalist. But the casts were cold, and Greatheart guessed that the man and his dog had been gone for a couple of days or more.

Had he but known that Storm and his master often went off for long tramps over the moor, being absent for three or four days at a time, he would not have felt so inconsolable. He would have realized that shortly they would be returning, and the fire once again burning on the hearth and the light shining in the cottage window. . . .

He whined, and looked longingly at the window that

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was shuttered and dark. Then he crossed the stretch of garden and jumped back into the lane.

At the top of the coombe he glanced back once again. All he could see was the distant shape of the cottage silhouetted against the now lightening sky, and beyond, a copse of larches that cried out as the early morning wind passed through their feathered branches.

As he passed the foot of Trout Hill and breasted the rise to Ware Ball, he knew that he was treading that path for the last time, and that never again would he go to the cottage, for the man and the dog whom he wished to see were not there. . . .

When he eventually reached Wellshead and stared down into the hollow, he saw the tarn no longer dark, but gleaming as the dawning light of a new day gave life to the still water. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

THE two otters remained in the vicinity of Wellshead for a further two days, mainly because fishing in the tarn was easier than going farther afield with the risk of being hunted in the neighbourhood of the moorland rivers.

Greatheart, too, did not go far away from Wellshead, having found a comfortable windfall under some boulders near which a rabbit warren afforded him such easy hunting as was necessary for his existence.

On the third night there was no moon, and when Greatheart came down to the tarn, he found the otters already gone. Their scent was still warm and fresh, and Greatheart had little difficulty in following the direction they had taken, which lay across the moorland that skirted the Somerset-Devon border.

For the best part of three hours he followed the course set by the otters, and it was just before daybreak that he slipped across the moorland road a few miles south of Brendon Two Gates, and found himself on the rough, gorse-clad slopes that characterized the Devon side of Exmoor. A little later he heard an otter whistling, and within a few minutes he had descended a slope and found himself in the region of a marsh in which Huicie and Soft Ear swam and splashed with glee.

Greatheart stood a few yards away watching them. But the two otters had grown used to seeing the dog, and did not express the fear that had formerly governed their actions.

Dawn was not far off. Already the east was streaked with light, and the moor was assuming a different shape and colour with every moment that passed. A soft breeze had sprung up, and as it passed amidst the rushes

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bordering the swamp, the otters whistled with excitement, and Greatheart cocked his head, little understanding their frivolous mood. But the reason was only too clear to Huicie and Soft Ear. The breeze, coming from the north-west, no longer contained the mantaint, and the excitement they experienced sprang from the sense of relief that took away their previous restraint.

Scarcely ten minutes later, they gave up playing in the marsh, and as if defying the dog to touch them, climbed to the summit of a boulder, and instantly fell asleep. Greatheart lay a little distance away, and kept watch . . .

The otters slept undisturbed until noon, and during that time Greatheart dozed, although in his uneasy sleep he was yet alert, and any movement threatening the safety of the otters would have brought him to his feet.

Huicie and Soft Ear spent most of the afternoon in the region of the marsh, searching for frogs, and just when they were beginning to tire of their sport, discovered, in an old rusty tin, an eel which they ate until only the tip of the tail was left.

Just before dusk, Greatheart caught two young rabbits, and having eaten them, left the remains conveniently near the rock on which the otters had lain during the hours before noon.

When he had withdrawn some distance away, Huicie and Soft Ear approached, sniffing the still warm flesh. But they did not eat. They much preferred the frogs which were so easy to flay alive.

The night was still young when the otters again set off, and Greatheart followed, keeping some twenty or thirty yards behind.

It was an easy journey that night, broken at intervals by the otters exploring what streams there

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were, and only travelling on when they seemed to have had their fill of trout which they killed for the sheer joy of hunting.

One such stream appeared to attract them more than the others had done. As they swam in the swiftly flowing current, they tasted the trace of sea water, and for the rest of the journey westward they kept close to its banks.

The river was now rapidly widening, and after flowing under a railway bridge became one with the Taw. For the past few miles the course of the river had been amidst isolated meadows, but now that it had reached the Taw, there were numerous villages which the otters and Greatheart were eager to avoid.

The trek onward was now only resumed when the night was well advanced, and whilst, at daybreak, Huicie and Soft Ear experienced no difficulty in finding a suitable hiding-place, the dog was not so successful. To avoid the habitations of man, he often had to retrace his footsteps until a belt of woodland afforded him the protection he required.

But he was not deterred from travelling with the otters. His need for companionship drove him on, and he was ready the next night to resume the journey with them.

The otters now began to travel more quickly, as if spurred on by some hitherto unexpressed urgency. They still journeyed by night, resting in the daytime in holts closely situated to the river.

The dog found that whilst the journey became less strenuous as the otters pressed upstream, he had not succeeded in establishing any sort of relationship with them. They certainly were no longer afraid of him, and even romped and played while he was but a few yards distant. But they never permitted him to take liberties with them, although there was an occasion when Huicie

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nervously tweaked Greatheart's bushy tail as he rolled on his back in an effort at play.

The river was now approaching the region known as Devon Hunt, and early one morning the otters came upon two herons fishing in a small creek.

Greatheart watched them as they robbed the herons of their catch, for the two birds had been busy most of the night, and what fish they could no longer eat had been thrown carelessly on the bank.

Finally the herons realized that they would be wasting their time if they remained close to the otters, and flew away with a heavy beating of their ungainly wings.

At their disappearance, Huicie and Soft Ear became conscious of a great weariness, and found a holt under some rotting timbers that had once been a platform for fishermen.

Greatheart, too, was very tired, and became less discerning in his choice of a sleeping place. Having discovered a barn near the river, he crept stealthily through the open doorway, and curling up on a stack of hay slept soundly until he was disturbed by something moving out in the yard.

In a moment his ears became pricked, and he half rose, ready to make his escape should any attempt be made to enter the barn.

But whilst the movement continued out in the yard, the sound led away from the barn. Suddenly, there came the sharp clatter of the closing of a steel-toothed gin, and it was followed immediately by a whimper and much scrambling as some hapless creature sought frantically to escape.

Greatheart ran out into the yard, and heard dimly the noise of a window opening and somebody shouting.

The dog's first thought was to get back to the river and security, but as he bounded past the dark shape crying with fear in the gin, he suddenly stopped.

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He knew the voice of the creature who was trapped, and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, saw that it was Huicie, held by the tip of his rudder.

The otter had followed Greatheart that night leaving Soft Ear asleep in the holt under the rotting timbers of the platform.

Huicie slept for less than an hour when he was awakened by the quarrelsome squeaks of some voles who were suspicious of the otters. Above their voices he heard the soft rippling note of the river, and suddenly realized that he was no longer tired.

For a long while, Huicie had swam up and down the river before leaving it at a point close to the farm buildings.

Having picked up Greatheart's scent, he trailed the dog, and in crossing the yard fell foul of the trap that had been set to catch a fox who had been in the habit of raiding the hen-coops.

He was now terrified, particularly when he heard a door being opened and footsteps coming across the yard.

Greatheart hid back in the shadows, a low growling in his throat. He heard Huicie whining with fear as he dragged at the gin that was securely held by a chain.

Where before there had been fear in his heart at the approach of man, there was now something different—a desire to fight!

As the footsteps drew nearer, the otter struggled more fiercely than ever to escape, and cries of acute distress came from him when he realized that he was helplessly trapped.

The man—a gruff farmer, rudely awakened from sleep and in a bad humour—stood over the otter. He then bent down and struck a match, lighting a lamp that stood near a heap of manure.



"Huicie, held by the tip of his rudder"



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"Ah!" said he. "Arter . . . Thought maybe it 'ud be gurt ole vox."

He picked up a shovel, and half kneeling, began to open the jaws of the trap. Then swiftly he grasped the otter by the rudder, while Huicie, crazy with fear, twisted himself around and tried in vain to bite the merciless fingers that held him.

The farmer, with a curse, prepared to swing the shovel, intending to batter the otter to death.

He did not know what struck him. All he heard was a savage growl, and a dark shape leaped on him from out of the flickering shadows, and he was conscious of fangs sinking into the fleshy part of his arm.

The man dropped Huicie as he fell back on the heaped manure, and before he could cry out, the thing that had attacked him was gone as had the otter, and the lamp he had lit lay on its side, the flame guttering in thickening smoke. . . . Somewhere, to the rear of the house, a fox was heard yapping. . . . But of the otter and the large animal who had sprung to his assistance there was never a sound.

The night had taken them as though they had never been.

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As Huicie made his escape, he was conscious only of getting back to the river. He was badly scared, and the tip of his rudder that had held him captive in the gin left a trail of blood which Greatheart followed when he, too, left the farm after having attacked the farmer.

By the time the dog had reached the river, Huicie had taken shelter in the holt, and Greatheart stood on the bank his ears pricked to distinguish any pursuing sounds.

He must have stood unmoving for the best part of

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five minutes before he saw a light approaching in the darkness. Then he heard voices, and knew that once again he was to be hunted.

Just as he turned to go he remembered that the otters, too, were the natural enemies of man, and he began to dig at the rotting timbers of the platform, whining in his throat as if warning Huicie and Soft Ear of the approach of danger.

Huicie, who lay nearest to the entrance of the holt, hissed with fear as the dog continued to scratch at the crumbling timber that projected out over the roof of the natural lair. Then he, too, heard the sound of human voices and warned Soft Ear, who had been patiently engaged in licking his injured rudder.

In a flash they slipped out of their refuge, and diving beneath the surface of the water swam swiftly upstream.

With their hasty escape, Greatheart waded across to the opposite bank, and before the farmer and his son had discovered the holt, he was already some distance away. He travelled a little to the rear of the otters who, in terror, kept to the centre of the river, as if instinctively knowing that it was safest to remain in mid-stream than to attempt the shadows under the shelving banks where many unseen obstacles might be encountered.

The night became chilly towards morning, and the stars shone frostily in the sky. The dew lay steaming in the meadows alongside the river, and the cattle that grazed where the grass was lush and green appeared distorted in the opaque atmosphere, and only the sound of hesitant footfalls came from them as they moved from place to place.

The river was now scarcely more than a turbulent stream. Its course was marked by boulders that loomed grotesquely in the half light.

Greatheart was tired. He had traversed a track that

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became increasingly difficult as the meadows gave way to stony and uncultivated moorland. There were times when he had lost all trace of the otters, and only located them when he heard a shrill whistle somewhere upstream.

At last the night grew dim; shadows drifted across the sky. The stars flickered and became pale, and then in the grey light of the dawn the outposts of Dartmoor reared grim and isolated out of the mist, with the distant shape of Belstone Tor like a fantastic castle on the skyline.

The silence of the moor was deeper than any silence of the night. Then a curlew called as the sun came up, and the mist became coloured with rainbow hues that seemed to reflect a mystic beauty.

But Belstone appeared to mark the very edge of the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

ON that, his first morning on Dartmoor, Greatheart was too weary to investigate the immediate surroundings. Apart from being tired after the strenuous journey he had made through the night, he was also very hungry, and it was only cunning and not strategy that enabled him to slay a buck rabbit that had thought himself hidden in the steaming mist of a Dartmoor morning.

He was somewhat revived by the meal, but did not hesitate to search out a resting-place which he found under the massed rocks of one of the lesser tors.

As he curled up to sleep, he heard, far back in the lair, the sound of much scuffling, and although his nose warned him of the fox-taint, he did not feel anxious to determine how near were these undesirable neighbours.

Greatheart slept heavily, occupying but a small place in the cavern. And while he slept, a vixen surreptitiously removed her cubs one by one, seen only by Huicie who was so much irritated by the ache burning at the tip of his rudder that he found it impossible to sleep. He was nosing around as if to make himself familiar with this new country when he saw the vixen appear. She glanced around apprehensively, and then vanished into an opening amidst the curious rock formation where, as the otter knew well, Greatheart had gone less than an hour or so before.

Anxious to see what would happen next, Huicie hid, partially concealed, behind a clump of gorse, and it was not long before he saw the vixen reappear, carrying a wriggling cub by the scruff of its neck.

Five times did the vixen do this until the refuge

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beneath the rocks was left to Greatheart who still slept, with his nose hidden in the curve of his bushy tail.

After a while, the otter resumed his investigations. There were many tiny pools shaped after the manner of a horse's hoof, and in them floated canoe-like seed-pods blown from the gorse. The otter played with the pods until they ceased to interest him, and then went in search of something more exciting.

At last he found a stream which he could reach by way of a steep slope. This pleased him, and time and time again did he slide down the slope, falling with a splash into the stream. And in the stream itself were many odd things to intrigue him. There was an old bottle, in the bottom of which a hole had been punctured by some enterprising schoolboy whose inventive genius had hit upon a novel way of fishing. That it must have been successful in the past was evident by the fact that Huicie discovered a fish trapped in the interior of the bottle. The fish could not find the hole by which it had entered, and it floundered helplessly, and not even Huicie could release it, although he held the bottle between his paws, letting the water drain out until the fish lay gasping and dying in the instrument of its captivity. When Huicie discovered that even then he could not release the fish, he threw the bottle away, and it sank to the bottom of the stream with a soft gurgling sound. And as once again the water flowed through the hole, the fish twisted and turned lifelessly, with staring eyes that bulged and would never again see the daylight playing upon the surface of the stream.

The otter then found a tin which was floating, half-filled, near the bank. It spoke to Huicie in liquid tones that somehow thrilled him until, urged by the desire for play, the otter tilted it with his paw, whereupon it swayed, and laughing huskily, sank from sight, leaving only a series of bubbles to mark its resting-place.

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When his rudder hurt, he licked it, lying half-curved on the bank, with the sun warming his glistening coat. But more often than not he forgot the dull pain in the excitement of play.

But there was so much he forgot that morning. He no longer remembered the vixen and her cubs; the seed-pods in the small pools; the bottle and the captured fish; the old tin. . . . There were so many things in this new country that attracted his attention, and in the delight of discovering something new he soon forgot that which had previously charmed him.

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Bogs and hummocks of tussocky grass made up the surroundings of Belstone; the tor itself, viewed from West Cleave, seemed at times higher than the clouds. The woods hereabouts were sparse and wind-shapen, and the ground for the most part was rough and broken up by the immense granite boulders that characterized the whole of Dartmoor. There was always, too, the strange silence in which the call of a curlew seemed strident like a bugle blown in a cathedral.

As Huicie walked about, lifting his head and sniffing the wind currents, he knew that he liked this place. It was safe, and the silence was something he could understand. Sometimes, when he sat upright, his head slightly inclined, he could just distinguish the sound of trickling water. It was on this part of the moor that five rivers had their birth, rivers that, beginning in peat darker than any on Exmoor, were shy to give voice to their new-found life, and only trickled with music where the moor seemed less close and overwhelming.

The otter decided that it was a very happy place, and returning to the stream that had originally attracted him he whistled with glee as he swam from bank to

bank. Within a few minutes he was joined by Soft Ear, who had also come to the conclusion that this new country was a safe and enjoyable place. Her only yearning was for a deeper river near which she could make her home and, when her cubs were born, initiate them into the mysteries of swiftly running water.

Because everything they encountered was unfamiliar, and the scents that came to them on the breeze possessed nothing to sting their memories with past fears, they were conscious of an elation that almost bordered on hysteria. And when not swimming in the stream they flushed pipits from the heather, and rapidly gave chase as the frightened birds flew in agitated flight until it seemed they became lost in the sun-whitened clouds that trailed over the distant tors.

Occasionally Huicie remembered his injured rudder, but memory was becoming blunted in the pleasure of experiencing new and strange sensations, and as the hours sped by the pain became less annoying, and recurring memory retained but little impression of the night's adventures.

For some time the two otters swam in the rivulet that wound around the foot of West Cleave, and leaving it at a point where a wood of ancient trees afforded shade from the sun they climbed upwards, reaching at last broad meadows that finally gave way to the approaches of Belstone. The tor was comprised of three outcrops of rock, medieval in appearance, while a little to the south was a tumulus. Beyond the earthworks was another stream that flowed westward before turning in a wide sweep to join the East Okement.

It had been a joyful afternoon of exploration for both Huicie and Soft Ear, and by the time the sun was low in the west they had travelled no mean distance from Belstone and the cavern in which Greatheart still slept.

GREATHEART

They suddenly remembered the dog when they were beyond Cawsand Beacon, and, stopping, both looked back. High above them, the tor reared in rugged isolation, its lower flanks seeming to divide the valley of the rivers, and making the distance back to Belstone seem greater than it actually was.

The two otters stood balanced on their rudders, staring across the moor to Belstone. They both missed the loping figure of the dog, and to their time-shortened memories, which retained with clarity only those incidents of immediate importance, it seemed the dog had always been with them, and they were a little surprised that he should no longer be a visible companion.

Huicie whistled as if intent on telling Greatheart where he could find them. But when there was no response, and no wolf-like figure came loping towards them, they continued on, confident that they would again see the dog before they reached the end of their journey.

In a little while the two otters had crossed the Wallabrook a mile or so below Raybarrow Pool, and not halting again until very late in the evening, found themselves at Dart Head, in the region of Cranmere—the mother of most Devon rivers.

Here they stopped for the night, Soft Ear finding the locality pleasing, and the Dart stream full of promise. She had known a similar stream on Exmoor which, in its lower reaches, had harboured falls and much fish, and also well protected holts such as she now sought in which to have her young.

That night they chased the reflection of the stars in the moorland pools, diving where the water lay deep and peat-stained; whistling with sheer delight as the ripples distorted the light reflections; bickering with disappointment when a cloud obscured the sky and the stars appeared lost in the depths of the darkening pools.

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They stayed in the vicinity of Cranmere for a couple of days, at first expecting to see Greatheart put in an appearance, then gradually forgetting him until even the memory of his loping figure no longer existed, so filled were their minds with the sight of things that made up their new and almost timeless existence. Deep down in their animal consciousness they were remembering less of the past and beginning to know only the heights of Cawsand Beacon, the dull flatness of Cranmere, and the dark, ebony-like waters of pools which were deep and pools which were shallow. All other things were ceasing to occupy any part of their lives, and thus soon became not even a memory.

On the third morning, Soft Ear was filled with a great restlessness, and having completely forgotten Greatheart, both she and Huicie, thinking only of the cubs that were to come, set off down the Dart, finally discovering the spot they sought near some falls a mile or two below the joining of the East with the West river.

For them the days of hardship were left behind, and, as far as they could understand with their limited perception of the future, life was likely to go on in a succession of perfect, care-free days, with no men and hounds to drive them from this country of mists and solitude.

And with the sound of the falls for ever in their ears as they lay curled up in a holt that was protected by the surging of water from the higher stream into the lower, they dreamed of the family they would soon possess, and the river gleaming golden beneath the moonlight, and the stars glimmering in those deep pools where salmon were wont to lie.

When they emerged from the holt, it was always as they had dreamed, with the river in full flood, and the banks dark with its wind-swept trees, and the boulders breaking the ebb of the currents, leaving those

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deep pools so plentiful with fish. And because life was now so glorious a thing, Huicie and Soft Ear would turn and roll in the river, sometimes swimming under the falls and trying to catch and hold in their webbed paws the ribbon-like ropes of water that poured in a silvery cascade from above.

A happy, happy life for them . . . as free as the river which they accepted as their own . . . and always there was the sob of the wind in the trees and the plaintive calling of the river to that which kept it moving within restricted limits. . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

IT was getting late in the evening when Greatheart awakened and rose yawning, to stand, when he finally emerged from the cavern, in the blood-red afterglow of a misty sunset.

A skein of wild geese flew overhead, making for the marshy wastes of Raybarrow Pool, and the slow rhythmical beating of their wings seemed to lend importance to their flight as they breasted the summit of Belstone without breaking formation.

When they had gone, the dog commenced to prowl prior to hunting, and when he came to the stream he fully expected to see the two otters. But he was not perturbed when he found them missing. He supposed they were still asleep in some holt they had discovered near to the river bank.

Greatheart went about his hunting that evening in a very painstaking manner. First he climbed to that part of the moor where the brown bracken of the previous year gave covering to the many rabbits that frisked thereabouts. Within ten minutes he had slain three bucks, and because the excitement for stalking had taken entire possession of him he continued with his almost primitive activities. He finally caught a woodcock that had been taken completely by surprise as he stood hunched up in his feathers under a clump of wind-twisted gorse, and the only cry he gave was that with which his life ended.

The dog carried the dead bird back to the scene of his earlier hunting activities, and caused panic to a stoat and a broken-wing plover, both of whom had appeared interested in the three rabbits thrown carelessly together amongst the bracken.

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The two made hasty attempts to escape as the dog approached, the stoat by running swiftly into the undergrowth, the plover by making a valiant effort to fly. The bird, finding it beyond his powers to rise, fluttered with desperation. He struggled forward, eventually seeking refuge in the bracken, and in fear of death uttered queer cries of distress.

But Greatheart had exhausted his desire for further hunting, and did not pursue either the stoat or the plover. After a moment's hesitation, he lay on all fours, and commenced to devour the largest rabbit until only the bones, entrails and skin remained as evidence of his feasting.

Dog-like, he then searched for, and found, a suitable place in which to cache the remaining two rabbits and the woodcock, and after leaving his scent mark on a nearby boulder, noted each individual characteristic of the spot as a definite means of identifying it when next he returned.

As he trotted back to the stream to drink, he thought of the two otters, and began to look for some trace of their presence. It was some time before he came upon the spoor of Huicie, and then only in the otter's paw impressions on the slope leading down to the river.

The slope showed obvious marks of the dog otter's playful activities, and Greatheart, wading the river to the opposite bank, found, in the shallows, the bottle with the dead fish, but as the running water had obliterated all scent of Huicie, the dog did not investigate any longer.

It was a little farther down-stream that he eventually picked up the cast of both Huicie and Soft Ear, coming upon it at a point where the two otters had frolicked together. Their spoor, this time, led away from the river, going due south-west to where the tors, like mountain peaks, seemed to crowd the skyline.

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Greatheart was disappointed. Sniffing at the trail, he knew that it was but a few hours' old, although owing to the dampness of the ground was already becoming cold and, in places, entirely broken by the heavy nature of the moorland over which the two otters had travelled.

The dog had entirely lost the scent before he came within sight of Raybarrow, and this because the marshy-land, whilst retaining in some instances perfect foot-prints, did not hold the cast of the creatures who had passed that way.

It was now becoming dark, and the first stars were shining in a sky crisp with a late frost. Greatheart felt the cold atmosphere clinging to his coat, and feeling somewhat dejected over his failure to catch up with the otters he retraced his steps back to Belstone only to find the cavern occupied by a badger whom he had to eject to the tuneless accompaniment of grunts and wheezings.

Greatheart was awake early the next morning and soon departed for the higher moor where he had hidden the two rabbits and the woodcock.

He ate the bird first, but since it was composed mostly of feathers and little flesh, Greatheart then devoured both rabbits. After wandering around for a couple of hours or more, he commenced to trot off in the direction of Raybarrow, his gait expressing his determination to leave Belstone and never return.

Raybarrow Pool lay south-eastward of Cawsand Beacon, and was reputed to be the most dangerous mire on Dartmoor.

Greatheart quickly learnt that it was a place to be avoided, for on approaching the locality he came upon a rag of Dartmoor colts which took fright at his appearance and commenced to gallop off in various directions.

One colt, a shaggy, black animal, with a tendency to legginess and immaturity, reared suddenly when

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within a few yards of the dog. Greatheart, with a growl, immediately leapt to the attack.

Quickly, for an animal so young, the colt sped towards the pool, with the dog in close pursuit. In less than a hundred yards the colt's pace slackened; suddenly he floundered and began to sink in the boggy ground. Greatheart checked his headlong rush, the oozing mire already gripping his feet.

The young horse meanwhile began to whinny with sudden fear, and plunging heavily sank almost to his hocks before struggling on to a firm patch of ground. His eyes showed the fear that beset him as he stood immovable, with nostrils dilated and sweat breaking out on his body in a steaming mass.

The dog watched, also with a strange terror gripping him. He growled in his throat and showed his fangs. Although less than thirty yards separated him from the colt, he dared not move forward. Over the pool itself two curlews twisted and turned. One uttered its weird and, in that lonely place, echoing cry. But the colt still did not move, but just stood, trembling with horror while the mud on his flanks attracted the bog flies, of which there seemed to be a vast number in spite of the fact that it was still early in the year.

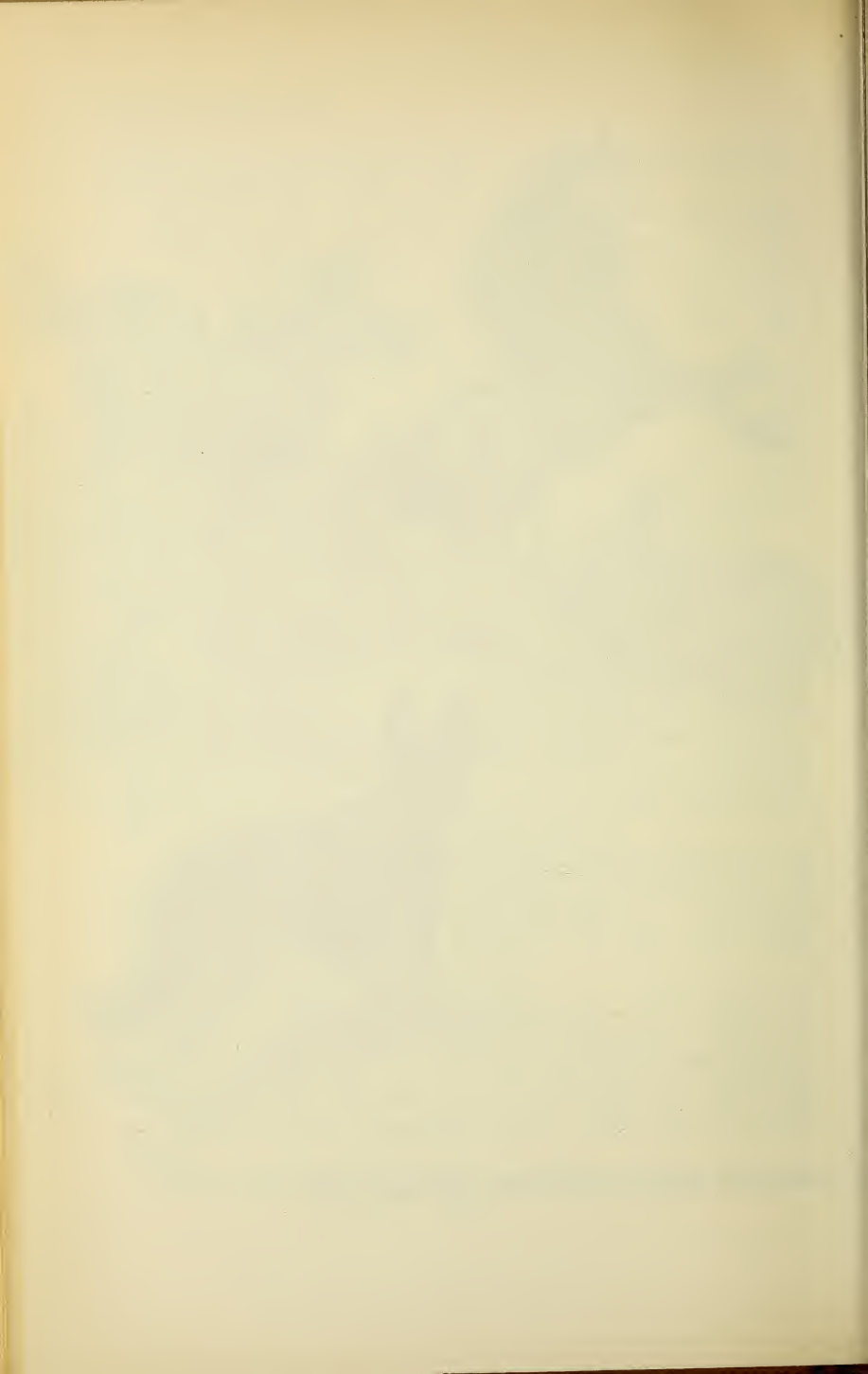
The dog's instincts warned him to get back on to the rough moorland, and gingerly feeling his way he trod hesitantly towards a nearby patch of heather, avoiding by instinct the bright green bog moss that covered the oozing slime beneath.

The colt watched him depart, but still remained unmoving, terror holding him to the spot where he stood, although his hooves were already making impressions on the ground, and water began to seep into the fissures on the quaking island which was his only refuge.

When the dog eventually reached a ridge of fairly



He came upon a rag of Dartmoor Colts which took fright"



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high ground north of the pool, he turned and looked back. The two curlews were still encircling the spot, while the young colt stood like a statue, with its mane tossed by the wind, and its tail waving slowly from side to side in an effort to beat off the blood-sucking flies.

Greatheart shook himself, and climbing the ridge noticed that he was east of the Taw Valley, with Gidleigh and Bittern Hill rising up ahead of him.

He then trekked onward, keeping to the ridge that finally flanked the Wallabrook before dropping down to the Teign Clapper Bridge below Castor Rock.

As he left the region of Raybarrow, he heard once again the colt whinnying with fear and desperation. The one short, backward glance the dog gave, once more revealed the animal standing motionless near the pool over which, like restless spirits, the two curlews still twisted and turned, but no longer called, as if they knew the colt had already heard their warning cry and understood.

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For the next two days Greatheart travelled across the moor, following almost the same course taken by Huicie and Soft Ear. Here and there the moor was relieved by a wooded valley of extraordinary greenness, with a river rushing wildly downhill, and proclaiming its freedom in a voice that was loud yet oddly musical.

The dog had travelled slowly since leaving Belstone, owing to the rough nature of the ground and his desire to avoid the bogs. Whenever he found himself treading on soft, quaking ground, his instinctive memory brought to life the vision of the young colt standing motionless on the edge of Raybarrow Pool, while the two curlews circled slowly and silently overhead.

Thus three days had passed before Greatheart reached

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the junction of the East and West Dart rivers. The aspect of the country was slowly changing; woodland took the place of grey stretches of moorland, and the hills were assuming a more pleasing shape and colour.

The dog's first glimpse of the meeting of the two rivers was from a hill that rose grassy and exposed above the woodlands that swept down to the valley. In the very heart of the glen the East and West Dart were like gleaming ribbons of silver that merged in a sudden torrent of scintillating light.

A little later, because the weather had grown much warmer, Greatheart swam in the river with increasing enjoyment, chasing the trout under low shelving banks, and negotiating boulders in mid-stream in a manner that would have done credit to the otters.

Not a great distance off, the dog could see the wooded slopes of Holne Chase that were reminiscent of the woods on Exmoor and the Mendips.

He therefore commenced to travel farther down the Dart, keeping for the most part to the woods which now swept down close to the river itself.

In places, the river ran noisy with a strong current that swept around the numerous rocks in sun-dazzled spray; in others, it flowed quietly with deep pools in which fish swam lazily to and fro. Always from the woods the Cuckoo called, and there were occasions when he was answered by a gull which had come inland from the distant sea.

The farther down-stream the dog travelled, the nearer became the wooded heights of Holne. The bleak aspect of the moor had now almost vanished, and the meadows showed signs of good husbandry.

Late on the afternoon of that third day he reached Holne Bridge, and when he had investigated the road that wound down from the hills, he stood on hind legs, with forepaws resting on the parapet.

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There was a new look in his eyes as if he were thinking back to that night on Exmoor when, on another such bridge, he had watched Huicie at play, and when the otter having departed up-stream, he himself had gone over to the cottage at Cloud.

As he stared down into the swiftly running water, he heard a whistle that brought his ears immediately erect. The whistle was repeated, and then . . .

Greatheart began to wave his tail. A little distance away, where the river dropped a few feet to a lower level, he saw Huicie and Soft Ear, playing and rolling in the frothy water from the miniature weir. They had not seen him, being too intent on their play in a stream of water that whirled and broke amidst the rocks, with a sound of music they knew and understood so well.

For a few short moments Greatheart stood staring over the parapet of the bridge watching them. As he watched, there came over him a perceptible change, as if he had ceased to be a creature of the wild and had become all dog. There was a dog's eager look in his eyes; there was a dog's happiness in the brisk waving of his tail, and when—in excess of excitement—he raced down to the river bank, there was a dog's voice in his eager barking.

And all these because he had found his old companions.

At the noise of his approach, the two otters ceased their play and trod water. There flashed through their minds a vague remembrance of Greatheart . . . Greatheart loping along under the stars . . . Greatheart following them as they trekked through mid-Devon . . . Greatheart catching a rabbit and then gravely watching them as they inspected the result of his hunting. . . .

All these things they remembered as the dog came rushing towards them. Then fear at his heavy barking swept through them . . . a fear of all dogs. . . .

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For one brief instant both Huicie and Soft Ear stared into the eyes of Greatheart as he stood with tongue a-loll and an almost puppyish enthusiasm expressed in his stance. Then in sudden terror the two otters dived beneath the water, and made for their refuge under the falls.

The dog's ears went forward in anticipation. He fully expected to see the otters surface again, almost under his very nose. His tail continued to wave; he whined in his throat. His eyes grew large with enthusiasm for the game he sensed the otters were going to play on him.

Then gradually the whining note of pleasure died in his throat; his tail, which had been raised to the level of his back, drooped slowly until it lay between his legs. And as the eagerness fled from his eyes, only then did he realize that the otters had forsaken him, and that he was again alone in a country that was alien and unfriendly. . . .

Only a trout leaping in mid-stream destroyed the illusion of a river cold and deserted!

CHAPTER SIX

GREATHEART lay disconsolately on the hillside below Holne. The fields fell away like a patchwork quilt until they merged with the woods abounding the Dart. Only in places where the woods were sparse was the silvery gleam of the river revealed. Its course, otherwise, was hidden amidst the trees.

The dog had no inclination to return to the river. Since having been deserted by Huicie and Soft Ear, he kept to the woods, becoming morose and uncertain in temper, and hunting now with a grim, tireless energy that soon resulted in his killing for the sheer joy it gave him.

That evening there was a brief shower of rain, and the moist earth filled the air with its scented breath. On the edge of a furrow, in a field adjoining the wood, a mole-cricket, at last awake from his winter's sleep, came to the mouth of his tiny tunnel and chattered amicably. He was ridiculed by a green tree-frog, and by the time darkness had crept over the woods and fields, the air was alive with sound—the voices of creatures who, released at last from the bondage of winter, and knowing that the days of fulfilment were upon them, were pleased to talk to the outside world.

The dog heard all these strange voices, but did not heed them. For him there was no mating call, no rendezvous with his brothers beneath the moon. . . . He must always run alone. . . . Always!

Just after sundown, the following day, Greatheart loped down the far slope of Holne, and crossing the Dart near Lover's Leap, made off towards the pleasant farmlands in the vicinity of Buckland. It was dusk when he approached the village, and as usual, where human

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habitations spelt danger, the dog became very wary, and halted under the trees adjoining the churchyard.

Buckland-in-the-Moor was a place of picturesque farms and cottages, and was almost entirely encircled by trees. From where he stood, Greatheart could see up the road. He kept himself well hidden in the shadows. In one of the cottages he heard an infant crying; in another he heard the sound of someone singing. Since this was the nearest he had ever been to any village, he flattened his ears against his skull, his appetite for exploration having suddenly gone in the need for extreme caution.

Then along the darkened road he saw a shadow approaching. He half-turned to hide and would have departed but for a familiar musk tickling his nostrils. A moment later he saw a fox creeping stealthily along with a white hen hanging from his drooling jaws.

Greatheart's body quivered with sudden expectancy. This was hunting he understood, and if it were not for the crying child and the sound of a song that instilled in him a curious sense of fear, he would have attacked Reynard and relieved him of his ill-gotten plunder.

He therefore let the fox go unmolested on his way, resolving, however, to inspect the farmyards when the stars were out and no lights gleamed from the cottage windows.

For the next hour or so he wandered across the valley, travelling in a westerly direction, and avoiding Ponsworthy—a hamlet on the West Webburn—reached Lizwell Meet where the river was joined by its eastern tributary.

The night had grown chilly; the dew lay glistening upon the meadows by the river, and as Greatheart made his way back to Buckland, he left a trail of blurred foot-prints.

By the time he stood once again by the wall of the

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churchyard, the whole village was in darkness. The low tower of St. Peter's Church could only be seen as a smudge against the sky, and the trees that surrounded the building were almost invisible and only the wind sighing through their branches betrayed their presence.

Greatheart had forgotten his intention to examine the local farmyards, but the musk of Reynard lay on the surface of the road, and remembering the plump fowl he carried the dog began to seek out a farm.

Greatheart passed silently through the village. Even his footfalls seemed curiously soft as he loped along.

A little way out of the village, standing almost at the foot of the Beacon, was a white-washed farmhouse the dog had noticed earlier in the evening.

The dwelling bore a vague resemblance to the cottage at Cloud. It possessed the same solid appearance.

Greatheart stood within a yard or so of the grey granite wall that encircled the farmyard. The house itself was in his line of vision, and was just a darkened shape with lightless windows that seemed to reflect the gleam of the stars. A strong odour of cows and manure came to his nostrils, but the scent Greatheart specially sought was not evident. It was clear that the occupants of the farm did not possess a dog, otherwise Greatheart would have found by now some trace of his existence.

Greatheart leaped the wall, then waited for a few seconds near one of the barns where the shadows were deepest. There was not a sound. The whole place seemed absolutely deserted and void of life. Then the dog heard a cow stir restlessly in its stall; and another did the same. A horse also began to move and stamp its feet. Then silence again, and only the night wind moving, bringing with it the accumulated scents of wet grass and cattle, and a musky smell that might come from a fox or marauding badger.

The dog commenced to move towards the low

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building from which came the odour of fowls. He sniffed the wire-netting that protected the run, finally discovering a rent where somebody had already forced an entrance.

Greatheart knew then that this was the place where Reynard had obtained his plunder, the fox taint clinging to the spot in no uncertain manner.

The dog began to dig at the hole already made by the fox. This he sensed was dangerous, but since the musky odour from Reynard was fresh and undisturbed, he knew that nobody had visited the spot since the fox had departed.

The noise of his scraping roused a hen. She fluttered on her roosting perch, and from another compartment came the sound of a cockerel becoming excited, and then the bird commenced to crow. He was immediately answered by the hen who began to cluck nervously.

Greatheart ceased his digging. He began to sense an impending danger. As the cockerel continued with his crowing, the cattle began to stir restlessly in the barn, and the horse started to neigh.

Greatheart stood ready for flight. He started apprehensively.

From the direction of the house he heard the sudden opening of a door, and then a light appeared.

Remembering his last experience in a farmyard, when Huicie had nearly met his death, Greatheart realized that it would be foolish to remain, and commenced to move off, running swiftly and low to the ground.

A voice shouted at him; the cattle in their stalls appeared to be plunging violently. The cockerel continued to crow and the hen to cluck. The remaining birds were huddled on their perches, held in the grip of fears.

Again the voice shouted. Greatheart, his ear flattened against his skull, took a long leap, calculated to carry him well over the wall.

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He slipped on the rotting refuse of the yard, and whilst the jump carried him over his objective, he landed heavily on the other side.

A sharp cry of pain came from him. In falling, his right foot struck a broken jar. He twisted around and almost rolled over. A jagged piece of the glass penetrated deeply into the pad of the foot, and for one brief moment the whole of the leg was temporarily paralysed by the intense shock of pain.

It seemed that his cry had roused every living animal on the farm, and as he limped away, he heard once again the sound of somebody shouting, and his sole idea was to escape.

His foot was stinging, and he was leaving behind a trail of blood. He knew at once that he could never hope to reach the shelter of Holne Chase that night, and he made instinctively for rising ground, conscious that most high hills were usually deserted.

Greatheart's progress was slow and laboured, and he whined as he tried in vain to force the pace. He slunk through the village, casting quick, backward glances that held fear and distrust for the things he had left behind at the farmhouse.

The shape of the hill before him seemed so near, yet the distance that separated him from it seemed greater than anything he had experienced.

At last the dog struggled up a steep incline; the turf was soft beneath his feet, and though he could not use his unjured foot, his progress was not so slow as when he was travelling along the road.

He finally reached a shallow depression in which was a small outcrop of rock. On the western side of the granite formation was a narrow shaft leading to a recess some five feet square.

Whimpering with pain, the dog crawled into the shaft, and, lying down, commenced to lick his foot.

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It was still bleeding, and smarted as if he had been treading on smouldering ashes.

He rested fitfully until the dawn began to flame behind the distant hills. His foot, whilst not smarting quite so much, was still worse than useless, and once again he started to clean it with his tongue, wincing every now and again, and sometimes whining.

His leg appeared to have shrunk from the loss of blood, and when he eventually tried to rise he realized that he was weak and strangely tired.

He did, however, manage to creep to the entrance of the shaft, where he lay stretched out full length.

It was very quiet on the hill. There was a little wind that blew coldly from the direction of the sea. A drifting mist eddied about the summit of the beacon, and when the sea-breeze finally prevailed, the wisps of vapour went flying like ragged banners across the lower slopes of Buckland Common. As the rocks on the distant beacon height stood out dark against the skyline, a jackdaw called, and a snipe rose with a shattering cry from a nearby stretch of heather.

Suddenly Greatheart gave a smothered groan as he raised himself. A sound—not associated with animals—had come to his ears.

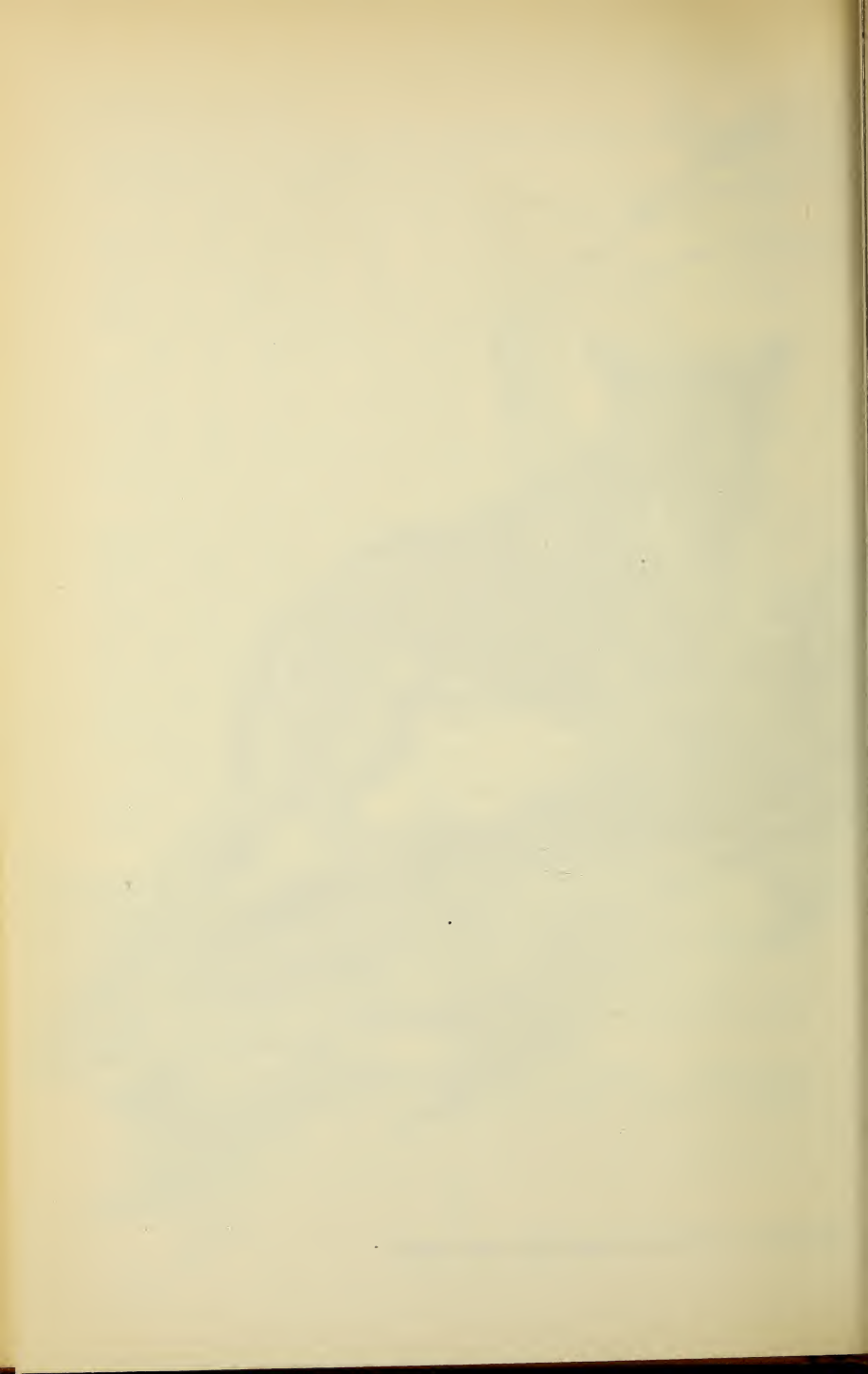
A man was approaching, seemingly following a trail which, from time to time, he examined closely by bending forward and peering steadily at the ground.

Greatheart snarled in mingled fear and hatred, and endeavoured to rise to his feet. . . . The man stopped, and looked up in surprise. The dog wrinkled his nose and showed his fangs, and then attempted to move farther uphill.

And all the time the man stood watching . . . shielding his eyes against the now glowing light of the newly-risen sun.



"Greatheart snarled in mingled fear and hatred"



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE man was quite young, and his lithe figure was clad in brown, home-spun tweeds. His face was inclined to leanness, but tanned with sun and wind and rain. Beneath the tan, however, the skin was smooth—a distinct contrast to the work-roughened hand that shielded his eyes from the brightness of the morning sun.

There was surprise reflected upon his face as he watched the struggles of the dog to escape farther uphill, and he knew from the way the animal limped, and the trail he had been following, that it was the same creature who had attempted to raid the hen-coop of his farm during the early hours of the morning.

At first it was curiosity that had led him to investigate the footprints in the soft soil surrounding the fowl enclosure. He had quickly decided which were those of a fox and those which were not. As he trailed the imprints across the yard, he said to himself: "The larger footmarks must be those of a dog or my name's not Radmore!"

Since having been roused by the pandemonium from the farmyard livestock, and then having heard the sharp cry of pain from the animal who so swiftly escaped when he came out of the house, his curiosity was such that he felt he must look further into the matter.

When he eventually returned to the house, and his bed, he was regretting that he had not pursued the marauding animal after the cry he had heard.

Radmore found himself unable to sleep, and when the first light of day began to glimmer on the window-panes, he roused himself, glad to know that as it was Sunday and he had little to do on the farm he could devote much of his leisure time to his whims.

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In less than ten minutes he was out of the house, and in another quarter of an hour had glimpsed Greatheart as he endeavoured to escape up the slope of the Beacon.

At first Radmore was sorry he had not brought a gun, and then seeing the type of animal who sought to escape from him, he experienced a pang of regret at the dog's obvious fear and distrust of man.

"Some poor devil of a dog who has been ill-treated and gone wild as a result," was his comment as he started to follow Greatheart up the hill.

Greatheart was aware of panic when he beheld the man still tracking him. His foot was in a bad way, and he was conscious of weakness in his hindquarters.

A sudden dip in the hillside afforded him a short respite, and as a stretch of scrub and thorn trees broke the barrenness of the gulley he took refuge at the base of a crooked bush with oddly shaped branches. Not a yard away, a stream bubbled up from some subterranean spring, and after drinking the dog lay watching along the path he had travelled.

He kept his eyes fixed on the point where he expected the man to appear, and when nobody came he grew uneasy, sensing some dangerous intent on the part of his pursuer.

The dog waited with every nerve tense in his body. His ears were pricked to catch any suspicious sound, but there was nothing save the whisper of the wind amidst the whins.

Then . . .

Even as Sekooshoo had risen startled when the dog's shadow fell on her as she lay deep in exhaustion, so now did Greatheart himself struggle to rise as a shadow passed across the face of the risen sun and fell slantwise upon him . . .

He bared his fangs, for watching him, at close

quarters, was the man from whom he thought he had escaped.

For once, Greatheart's long experience in the wild had failed him. He had not noticed that the gully in which he had taken refuge broke away a few yards from the thorn tree beneath which he was hiding, and that behind him the ground was little better than open moorland which slipped steeply downhill towards a low, white farm building.

Radmore had shown more knowledge than the dog in the matter. He had guessed the gully would entice the animal to seek covering, and he had turned a little to the north when Greatheart had disappeared from view. So quietly had he approached the mouth of the narrow, coombe-like hollow that the dog had heard nothing of his ascent, and he stood admiring the splendid shape of the animal's head as, quivering with nervous excitement, Greatheart gazed steadfastly in the direction from which he expected his pursuer to appear.

It was only when Radmore took a pace nearer that his shadow fell across the dog, causing him to start up with fear. At sight of the animal's stumbling movement Radmore gave a gasp of compassion.

Greatheart's hind legs seemed unable to support him, and he fell back with a snarl of defiance. Despite the fastidious cleaning of his injured foot, during the night some infection had entered the bloodstream, bringing about a form of temporary paralysis, and he now considered himself at the mercy of man—his acknowledged enemy.

Radmore dropped to one knee and spoke to him.

"You don't trust me, do you?"

There was a sympathetically pitched note of gentleness in his tones that made Greatheart think of Storm of Dancerwood's master—the naturalist. This man possessed much the same quality of voice.

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But Greatheart also remembered a man with a whip and another with a gun. He thought too of men with horses who had hunted Reynard of the split ear, and the manner of his death as the men appeared. With these memories tormenting him, he growled savagely as if warning Radmore to keep his distance.

The fellow knelt, regarding him with a look of surprise.

"You *are* ill-tempered," he said, "but there's probably a reason for it."

He shook his head, and then suddenly smiled as a thought came to him.

"Won't you let me look at your foot?" he asked, in a voice calculated to win Greatheart's confidence.

He stretched out a hand for the dog to sniff. With lightning-like suddenness the dog snapped, and as Radmore instinctively drew back at Greatheart's hostile lunge he saw that there was an abrasion where the fangs had almost gripped him.

He knew then that it was useless for the present to try to obtain anything but distrust from the dog, and Radmore rose to his feet, deciding to go back to the farm and return with meat which he hoped would overcome the animal's fear of him.

Without a word to Greatheart, he went out through the gap and straight down the hill towards the farm.

Had Greatheart but known it, the farm was the one from which he had attempted to steal but a few hours before. In making his escape by way of the village, he had merely travelled in a semi-circle, and the point where he now lay was actually quite near to the dwelling which was situated on the western slope of the hill.

He trembled with nervousness as he watched the man depart, and then endeavoured once again to get to his feet. But he was helpless, and began to pant with distress.

His foot also had commenced to bleed again which, dimly he understood, was a good thing, for with the renewed bleeding came away some of the impurities which were slowly poisoning his body.

He alternatively licked his foot and watched the fellow's descent down the hill. Distrusting the ways of man, he suspected treachery, but in his present plight was unable to help himself.

For a short while he busied himself in cleansing his paw, and then, glancing up, saw the man once again ascending the hill.

In a moment Greatheart forgot all else in his desire to escape, and made another attempt to stand. The effort was futile, and with a groan the dog lay with his head resting on his left foot, waiting for what he thought was bound to be the end.

The man drew nearer and Greatheart saw that he carried a parcel.

His heart thumped and a nervous twitching started in his hind legs. At last Radmore stood once again before him. He carried no gun, which the dog thought a good sign, but there was the parcel . . . some other box of wisdom, he supposed, and he bared his fangs in anticipation.

The man then surprised him by sitting on the ground less than a couple of yards away. He unwrapped the parcel, and the dog's mouth lolled open, for he had drawn from the paper a lump of red meat which he proceeded to cut up with the aid of a pen-knife.

"Taste that, old chap," he exclaimed, tossing a piece to Greatheart.

The dog did not move. His eyes remained fixed on the man before him.

"Go on . . . eat it!" Radmore urged.

But still Greatheart remained motionless. This, he felt, was yet another trick of man. He scanned Radmore

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apprehensively. He certainly did not possess the stick that spat fire, and he had brought what his nostrils already told him was perfectly good meat. But somewhere, lurking at the back of his canine mind, was the knowledge that man was all powerful, that he could, by means unknown to the dog, bring about that great sleep in which ears heard not, eyes saw not, and movement became lost in a stillness that was inscrutable as it was profound.

Radmore suddenly tossed him another piece of the red meat. This time, more by habit than anything else, Greatheart sniffed it, but did not attempt to eat.

Then the man began to talk to him. Greatheart, not versed in the ways of human speech, felt compelled to listen. Those words that were uttered meant something. They lingered in his ears with a curious insistence, and there was again that odd, likable tone of sympathy that somehow found some response in his canine soul. Greatheart could not understand it. He pricked his ears, turned his head from left to right in much the same way as Storm of Dancerwood had done when his master spoke to him on that far Exmoor hill, while Greatheart stood nervously watching. And while the man spoke, nothing happened. There was no sign of treachery from him, nothing save the quiet voice going on and on, and a smile that seemed never to leave the man's face.

Then suddenly it did happen! Greatheart had half expected it. The fellow's hand was moving towards him, holding out a bit of meat.

The dog growled.

"It's all right, old chap. I mean you no harm," the man's voice said.

Greatheart did not understand that this was a gesture of good will, but the voice soothed him, and this time he did not attempt to snap at the hand that was approaching nearer and nearer.

GREATHEART

The meat was now held under his very nose, and he sniffed it. It seemed good. He would have liked it. But . . .

"Go on, old chap. . . . Eat it!" the voice urged.

Greatheart turned his head away, and he was aware of conflicting emotions—distrust of the hand, but a queer respect for the voice. . . .

He compromised. Whilst he did not touch the meat, he permitted himself to again sniff it.

Finally, Radmore having cut up all the meat, placed it on a paper before the dog, and withdrew some distance away.

Greatheart's confidence returned. He licked the meat, then, with his eyes still fixed on the man, gulped the lot, and waited. . . . Nothing happened! He began to pant. His ears were set at an inquisitive angle.

Then the man again sat down, this time with his back against a boulder, and taking a pipe from his pocket, amazed the dog by causing smoke rings to curl into the air.

Greatheart's eyes never left the man's face, who himself seemed lost in contemplation. Without moving, he sat pulling at his pipe for the best part of two hours, while the dog just watched.

Towards noon the fellow got up and smiled down at the dog. Then with, "I'll be seeing you, old chap," he went slowly down the hill, and for the first time in his life Greatheart experienced a vague regret, and quivered with suppressed dismay.

After drinking once again from the spring water, he must have lain staring down the hill for a long time. Then he saw the fellow once more climbing up from the valley.

Greatheart raised his head, his eyes gleaming and his whole body trembling. Then the previous performance was repeated, with Radmore tossing him meat which,

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this time, he ate without fear. The last piece he actually took from the man's outstretched hand.

Radmore remained with the dog until late in the afternoon, sometimes talking to him and sometimes sitting with his back against the boulder and pulling at his pipe.

He had hoped to do something about the dog's injured foot, but feeling that any attempt on his part to examine it would result in antagonism from the animal, he decided to let Nature take its normal course.

Towards sunset, a bell began to ring from the squat-towered church in the valley, followed by a peal which seemed to echo across the hills.

When the bells ceased, there was a silence, and only a cow lowed in some distant field, and in the village of Buckland a small dog yapped.

It did not seem much later when the first stars began to twinkle above the hills, and a light gleamed out from the white farmhouse in the valley. And when suddenly Greatheart raised his head, he saw a dipper of a moon, but no man.

He had silently vanished, and the dog had not seen him go.

Greatheart only knew that he was lonely, and when he eventually dozed he seemed to see only the man's face . . . smiling at him . . . and heard his voice, talking . . . talking . . . always talking. . . .

Above his head, under the silver dipper of the moon, the old thorn tree seemed white with blossom. . . .

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Greatheart slept peacefully all the night through, and towards daybreak, when the wind blew coldly from the sea, he stirred in his sleep, and his hind legs kicked a little as life returned to them, and the sluggish blood

GREATHEART

commenced to move more quickly, conquering the poison that was now dispersing.

Just after dawn the dog heard a blackbird whistling in the thorn tree. It seemed that the bird sang for an extraordinary length of time. Then with a wild twittering he flew away, and Greatheart sat up abruptly, for coming up from the white house at the foot of the hill was the figure of the man.

Greatheart waited expectantly. As the man drew near, he called out, and the dog wanted to rise to greet him. He did indeed jump up and found that though still a little weak he could stand.

He suddenly felt the desire to run away. He turned to go. Then again the man called, and something stronger than his natural fear held him rooted to the spot. He wanted to hear the man speaking to him again!

Greatheart did not go far away from the thorn tree that day. He ate the meat Radmore brought him, and when he had gone, again commenced to clean his injured foot.

Radmore came twice to the dog during the afternoon, and each time Greatheart waited under the tree, watching his ascent from the valley, with his heart beating unnaturally fast and his limbs trembling. . . .

That night, when the stars were out and the dipper moon was high in the sky, Greatheart limped down to the white house. For a long while he stood outside the granite wall, staring at the yellow light that streamed out from one of the windows

He wanted to look through that window as once before—not so very long ago—he had looked into the window of the cottage at Cloud and saw the dog Storm of Dancerwood lying peacefully at the feet of his master before a blazing fire. . . .

But he had not the courage to enter the limits of the farmyard, and after a while he limped back up the

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hill, and again slept under the thorn tree that smelled fragrantly in the darkness. . . .

The pale crescent moon travelled its course; the shadow of the thorn tree lay upon the dog as he slept. An owl called. A cow lowed from the farm in the valley.

The coombe, with its whin bushes and thorn trees, seemed a quiet, deserted place, and the trees themselves etched silver-white in the darkness.

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It was the last day of Greatheart's servitude in the wild. The dawn, that morning, had been a little slow in coming, but when the sun eventually crept up over the far horizon, it promised one of those perfect days in spring when the world assumed a beauty that was manifest in every tree, in the shape of every hill, in the greenness of every meadow, and in the shrill calling of the birds who haunted high and solitary places.

Greatheart sensed that something was going to happen that day. He had felt it coming for the past three days during which the man had visited him, and brought meat and then sat for an hour or so talking to him. The dog no longer felt fear at the man's presence. Indeed, he missed him when he returned to the white house in the valley. On the second day Greatheart had wanted to follow, but was nervous and shy, and did not like to let the fellow see his eagerness to be with him.

Early on that last day of Greatheart's life in the wild, Radmore again came to the dog, and after sitting with him for half an hour or so, rose to return home.

"Won't you come with me, old fellow?" he asked.

Greatheart looked at him. No longer was there hostility in his eyes. There was a new light shining in them—a new eagerness. He had even begun to wave his tail. But his moment had not yet come. He was still

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apprehensive. He had not altogether forgotten those events of the past when man had treated him so badly.

Radmore saw at once the indecision that was working through the animal's mind, and felt that it would be better for the dog to come with him of his own free will than to be persuaded against his instinctive judgment!

He therefore decided to return again later in the day, and with, "I'll be seeing you, old chap," uttered very softly, he went back down the hill, knowing that Greatheart stood unmoving at the head of the coombe, watching him until he could see him no longer. . . .

There were now strange influences at work in Greatheart. The man represented something he felt really should have been his long, long ago. He sensed too that he would only obtain this thing by becoming one with the man. And as he watched once again the fellow going down the hill to the farm, he wanted to run eagerly after him—to bark, to leap about him, to express in his own way what he felt deep down in his canine consciousness.

All that afternoon Greatheart sat on the open hillside staring down at the farmhouse. A spiral of blue smoke rose from its chimneys; here and there, in the fields, small figures moved backwards and forwards—men going about that which was their daily task.

Towards evening two horses passed up the lane, with a man following behind in a leisurely fashion. As the horses passed through the open gateway into the farmyard the man stopped, staring up the hill.

Greatheart jumped to his feet. He knew it was Radmore! He barked and waved his tail. The man raised one hand in a gesture of greeting, and a moment later he too entered the farmyard and became lost to sight amongst the scattered out-buildings.

The dog was somewhat disappointed when he could

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no longer see Radmore, but he knew that it would not be long before the man again visited him.

The evening was creeping stealthily over the foothills. In gradually deepening shadows, it moved up towards the clumps of woodland and finally stood in misty isolation in the hollows. One or two crows were encircling an enclosed copse at the foot of the hill, and their harsh voices reached the ears of the dog as he stood watching, with nerves tingling, and a queer unrest in case the man should fail to come to him that night.

It was almost dusk when Radmore did finally put in an appearance. The first stars were already glimmering in the sky, and the evening itself steeped in the quietness that precedes nightfall.

Radmore whistled when he was halfway up the hillside. In an instant, Greatheart responded to the invitation. Forgetting that his foot was still somewhat sore, he came running down the slope, and when within a few yards of Radmore he stopped, with waving tail and shining eyes, waiting for the man to speak.

"Hello, old chap," Radmore said gently.

Of his own free will, the dog stepped nearer . . . nearer still, and then sniffed the man's outstretched hand. There was complete trust in the action, as if he knew he need never fear this man who, for the past three days, had come to him, bringing him meat and staying with him during the period of his inactivity.

And now, in what for him was the great hour of revelation, the dog knew that he had no wish to go away—that he wanted to remain with this man for ever.

"Are you coming back with me?" Radmore asked. Greatheart looked up into his face.

The man knelt before him, holding out his hand in token of friendship, and the dog, after a short pause,

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crept forward. Then, to Radmore's surprise, he sat back on his haunches and held up his injured paw.

This was his first act of submission to man. Life, as he had known it, had allowed for nothing like this. He had suddenly achieved an orientation far greater than any he had hitherto achieved during his long sojourn in the wild. Hard living had transformed him into an animal who had exercised skill to exist, and as a result had instilled into his mind a distrust for all who possessed greater power than he. But now it was all different. Man had wrought a change in him, and the change was like a reflux, gently softened by influences that went to the very roots of his being and made him pliable where before he had been of an adamantine texture. And he knew now that he possessed for the first time life's greatest potency—a potency moreover that would bring him into direct contact with the gods. . . .

When Radmore rose to his feet and turned to go down the hill, Greatheart was ready to accompany him. He walked without hesitation, almost as if he had been the companion of man since the very day he had been born.

Down into the dusk they went, becoming mis-shapen and curiously phantom-like as they passed through the mist that had gathered in the hollows.

Only once did the dog falter, and that was when Radmore passed into the farmyard and went up to the door of the house.

Not since the day when he had deserted man for a life in the wild, and had been driven up a Somerset coombe by a fellow with a whip, had Greatheart been so near to entering a human habitation.

Radmore glanced back at him.

"Come on, old chap," he said. "You needn't be afraid!"

GREATHEART

Greatheart understood.

There was that in the man's voice which inspired confidence, and whilst he knew not what love was, some aspect of it was made manifest in the pain and unrest he experienced deep down within him. As he stood looking up into Radmore's face, some instinct acquired from his forebears told him that he would only lose that strange pain and unrest when he had achieved merit in the eyes of the man he had accepted as his god.

And when the latch was lifted and the door opened, and the yellow lamplight streamed out into the gloom, Greatheart and his master were, for a brief moment, silhouetted against the glow.

Then the door was shut behind them, and both dog and master stood together for the first time as companions within the house that was to be home. . . .

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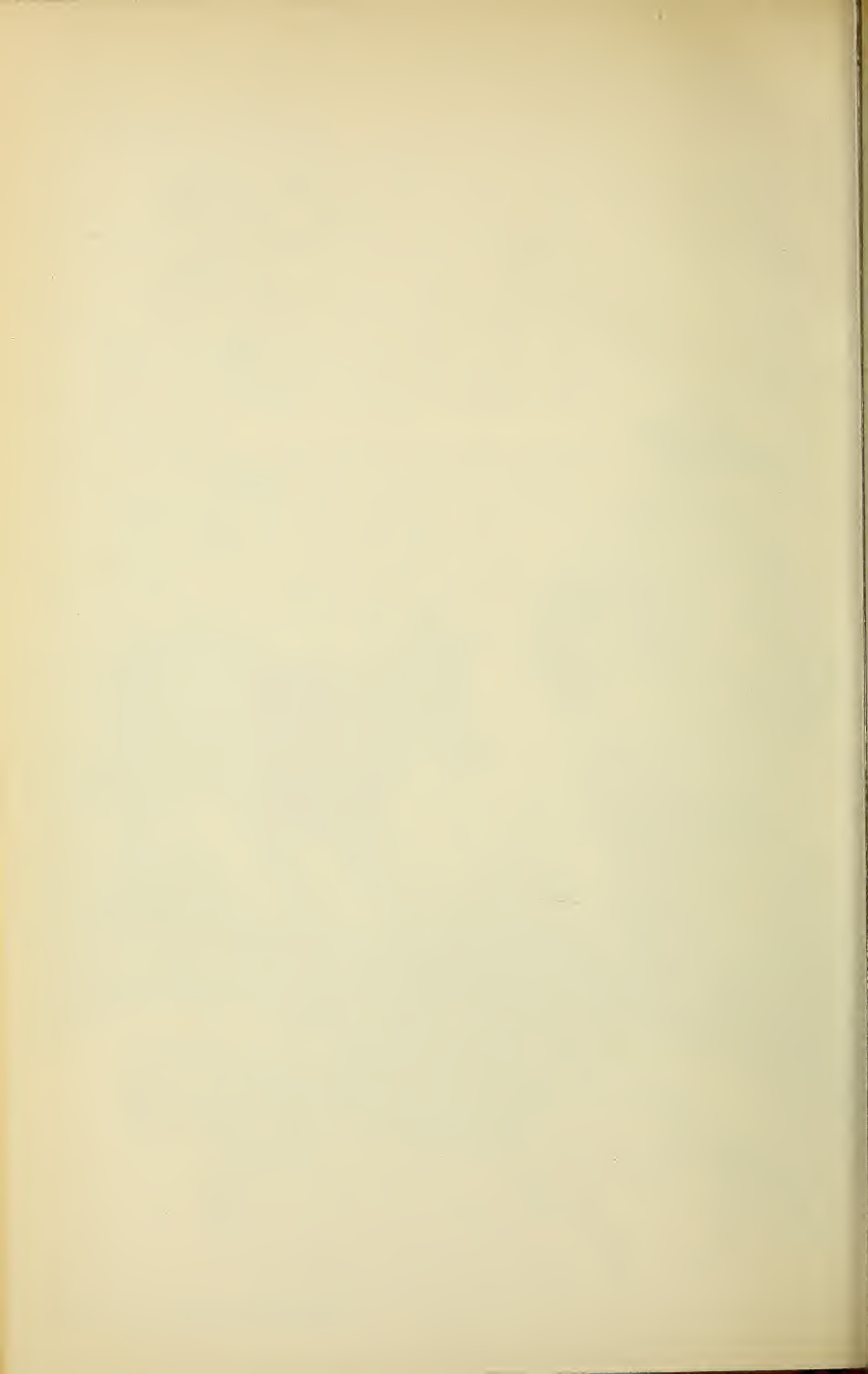
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On the edge of the coombe, the thorn tree whispered in the breeze as if telling a tale about a dog and a man; but towards midnight the tree was silent, its blossoms creamy-white under the misty radiance of the moonlight.



"Down into the dusk they went"



BOOK THREE

AND A DOG SHALL LEAD WHERE STRANGE FEET FALTER

CHAPTER ONE

THE kitchen was huge, with an old-fashioned brick fire-place which occupied almost a third of the eastern wall. A large window let in the sunlight, and at night reflected the far-off glow of the stars. It was during the hours of twilight before the lamp was lit that the firelight flickered like dancing feet on the oak-beamed ceiling, and caused shadows to leap and become wildly grotesque in the room itself. The copper utensils that stood on the large oak dresser responded to the firelight in a way that was warm and curiously reassuring.

On his first night in the kitchen, despite his obvious nervousness, Greatheart noticed much that eventually became firmly impressed upon his animal consciousness.

Lionel Radmore, on bringing the dog into the house, immediately introduced him to the woman who was his mother. Mrs. Radmore—a widow—had heard so much about the dog during the past three days that she was excited to meet him. She had been unable to understand her son's attitude towards the animal. When Lionel had first spoken about Greatheart, she had asked him to bring the dog home at once. But when Lionel explained that he wanted to win the animal's trust and confidence, she thought him just a little foolish, saying that Greatheart would assuredly wander off when his foot was well enough to permit him to travel.

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Lionel, however, had thought otherwise, and at last he had justified his patience. Greatheart had come with him of his own free will which, Lionel considered, was as it should be.

Greatheart accepted the woman as something belonging to Radmore, and within a few minutes of his arrival at the farmhouse she brought him a dish of fresh meat, whereupon his confidence in her amounted to something closely resembling respect.

Then disaster overtook him. A large black-and-white cat walked sedately into the room. She paused on the threshold, her tail raised in a fluffy banner. Her back became arched, and as Greatheart faced her, she suddenly leaped forward, spitting with anger and scratching his nose.

Greatheart, in spite of his long career in the wild, was suddenly and ingloriously defeated. He was at a disadvantage in the room, and let out a howl. From that very moment the cat was his master!

Once the cat, Fluff, had subdued the interloper, she took no further notice of him and completely ignored him. Taking up her special place by the fire, she appeared to doze, although more than once she watched him out of half-closed eyes as he lay at Lionel's feet. She was not prepared to trust him any more than he was prepared to trust her.

Greatheart's first night in the house filled him with a strange, recurring sense of awareness, particularly of things that were as unfamiliar as they were disturbing.

When Lionel and his mother had retired for the night, and the cat had gone out to keep some nocturnal rendezvous, Greatheart found it difficult to sleep, although the fire still burned brightly, sending out a pleasant warmth that filled him with a rare sense of comfort.

The trouble was there were curious sounds in the

house—the creaking of old floorboards, and somewhere—seeming far away—the sudden scurrying of mice behind the wainscoting.

Once, just after midnight, Greatheart heard a fox yapping. Creeping quietly towards the window, he reared up on his hind legs and stared out into the gloom. Reynard had become silent, and all the dog could see were the dark shapes of the farm buildings, and far above them the stars shining as they had always shone since the very beginning of the world.

Greatheart spent the rest of the night half dozing and half alert, while the fire smouldered and died in grey ashes, and the daylight began to glimmer on the window-panes.

Slowly the room seemed to awaken to life. The objects in it passed from mere shadows into shapes both substantial and significant.

Out in the farmyard a cock commenced to crow. Soon afterwards the dog heard the sound of somebody moving about overhead. Not many minutes later he heard the tread of his master's feet on the stairs, and Greatheart rose to greet him.

"Hello, old chap!" said Lionel, with a warmth in his voice that the dog liked. "Coming out for a walk?"

Greatheart looked up at him, not quite understanding the meaning of the words his master uttered. But when Lionel opened the front door and said, "Come on, lazy bones!" he understood only too well that he was expected to follow.

With a wild tumbling of feet he ran out into the farmyard, and turning around, looked up into Lionel's face and commenced to bark.

"Not too much noise now," Radmore said authoritatively.

In an instant Greatheart seemed to know what

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was required of him, and preceded his master with a wildly waving tail.

Brushing with hasty footsteps the morning dew, the two went up the hill and stood at last beneath the thorn tree, with all the valley spread out at their feet like a vast coloured quilt.

That same day an important conference was held in the kitchen. It centred about the name the dog should bear. Mrs. Radmore had quite a few suggestions to put forward. She herself preferred the name of "Peter". Radmore looked down at the dog during the discussion and shook his head.

"Only one name is suitable for him," he said at last. And as he said it, he saw the animal as he had first seen him on that morning a few days before—struggling up the hill despite his injured foot. There was no doubt about it, the dog had shown extraordinary courage and determination, and one name only was possible—"Greatheart", for the animal had truly shown how great-hearted he was in the face of adversity.

And so Greatheart it was—which name was engraved on the fine new collar Lionel brought home a few days later.

The next week Lionel took Greatheart in hand, teaching him to have respect for the farm stock. Due to his long sojourn in the wild, the dog did not respond too readily; but after a while soon learnt that his master was to be obeyed in all things, and whilst he often eyed the fowls with a somewhat greedy look, Greatheart left them severely alone.

Greatheart's next important lesson was in connection with sheep. His first reaction when brought into direct contact with a moorland flock was to crouch away, looking up at his master to see if he kept hidden about his person the stick that spat fire. Lionel was a little puzzled, and having no knowledge of the dog's long

existence in the wild, was led to mere conjecture on the subject, in which he approached very near to the truth.

It seemed that the animal had developed almost a fear of sheep, and to test the dog, one morning let him come on a flock that was sheltering in a hollow. Since Greatheart was running ahead of his master, he found the sheep while Lionel was too far off to restrain any impulse he might have to harm the flock.

He was certainly interested, but disclosed no sign of fear. Neither did he, because he was alone, attempt to throw the sheep into a panic. He just stood watching them, his tail raised at an excited angle.

It was only when Lionel came up to him that he half crouched away as if expecting some form of punishment.

That gave Radmore the only clue he needed. Somewhere—some time—Greatheart had been the object of special attention because of his association with sheep, and Lionel had little difficulty in imagining what had transpired. The dog had either been severely beaten or had received a lesson he would never forget.

Radmore was by way of being something of a philosopher, and knew exactly the course to pursue. He lost little time in putting his plans into action, and with the aid of a shepherd, he began to teach Greatheart how to herd sheep.

Having complete trust in his master, Greatheart responded in a way that won even the admiration of the rather cynical shepherd. But he had much to learn despite his enthusiasm. Still, Lionel had solved one problem, and soon set about tackling the others as they became apparent.

Once Greatheart had overcome his fear of running sheep, he was taken amongst various flocks, and working under the jurisdiction of the old shepherd, learnt to sit and then lie flat on word of command, eventually

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becoming experienced in the herding of a flock into an improvised pen.

Some few weeks later, a few of the shepherd's friends set off on a shooting expedition. Having heard so much about Radmore's wonder dog, they made for the Beacon where they understood the animal was engaged in guarding sheep.

The moorland rose steeply before them; high above the Beacon, the clouds were blown in confusion by a contrary wind. A brace of snipe rose at their approach but the men were too engrossed on their climb to give the birds more than a cursory glance. They were within a few yards of the summit when they stopped.

Radmore and the shepherd were standing under the shadow of the rocks deep in earnest conversation while around them were the sheep quietly grazing.

But the climbers saw not so much the two men and the sheep as they did the dog, who was standing on the summit of the Beacon watching with keen eyes the flock which but a few minutes before he had been herding.

Alert and magnificent, he appeared to dominate the whole scene. His colour was emphasized by the background of trailing cloud across a sky of intense blue. His head was raised high and his nose was testing the wind currents.

The men from the village had never before seen an animal like him, and they just stood gazing until noticed by Lionel, who then proceeded to introduce them to Greatheart. Greatheart acknowledged their greetings by waving his tail, and Lionel, who had been pleased to witness the animal's reaction to the group of men, saw the light of happiness in the dog's eyes. He knew then that Greatheart was losing his distrust of the human species.

As the days sped by, Lionel was more than satisfied

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by the way the dog had settled down in his new surroundings. Greatheart had accepted the change in a manner that was astounding when viewed in relationship to the fear and suspicion with which he had regarded Radmore on his first acquaintance with him.

But the days were approaching when a great restlessness becomes manifest in all creatures who inhabit the wild, and as the sickle moon rose a little later each night, assuming gradually its full glory, that subtle restlessness increased until in a tormenting current it made its impact upon the senses of Greatheart. At last the mating moon was at its full, and whilst the dog was conscious of uneasy canine longings that made him wish to remain with his master, the strange call of the wild became a force that soon influenced his whole being.

As much as he loved the warmth of the fireside when the kitchen was in darkness, and Lionel and his mother had retired for the night, he wished he were out alone in the expanse of moonlit space, where each shadow became distorted and all nocturnal life possessed a spontaneity that was due to the mellowness of the mating moon.

During those first few nights when the moon was rising large and honey-coloured over the hills, Lionel often heard Greatheart moving about restlessly in the kitchen below. He thought it was merely due to the brightness of the moonlight, little realizing the mighty forces that were at work in the dog—those same laws that had governed his actions ever since he was a puppy.

Then on the night when the moon commenced to wane the unexpected happened! Because it was warm in the kitchen, Lionel left the casement window unlatched before he went off to bed. An hour after midnight, Greatheart felt the wind blowing in on him.

He immediately jumped to his feet, stood for a moment testing the air currents, and then crossed over

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to the window. For a few minutes he stood staring out into the night while ideas moved at first formlessly, then with clear-cut precision through his mind. The next thing he knew was that he had discovered a way of opening the window to its fullest extent, and had leapt out into the moonlight which seemed to enwrap him in one immense thrill of excitement that found expression in his steady loping towards the open moorland.

And he was aware of running with a companion—his shadow. But no matter how quickly he ran, he could not outstrip the phantom animal who was just a little ahead of him.

Suddenly Greatheart halted, and his shadow companion halted with him. Greatheart panted with excitement. The whole moonlit night was so still and fragrant with dew. The rocks loomed sharp and towering; their shadows seemed to lend them an added girth and majesty. Far out on the moorland a pony neighed, the sound appearing to travel with emphasis in the almost unbroken hush. Then was heard the distant rumble of a freight train pulling out from Ashburton. From some moorland farm came the crowing of an awakened cock.

But Greatheart merely pricked his ears, his whole body taut with the curious excitement that held him in its grip.

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The dawn was tinting the eastern sky and creeping across the foothills before the dog turned towards home.

No longer did his shadow companion run with him. He ran alone. But despite the fact that his body was weary, his eyes shone with happiness, and when his master opened the farmhouse door to admit him, the man could not help noticing the new confidence that

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gave an additional tilt to the dog's ears and a resemblance of fearless character to his panting jaws.

Lionel knew then that he need never fear that Greatheart would wander away. The dog's return to the farmhouse after his night of stolen freedom out on the moor was, his master considered, the animal's final declaration of his complete submission to man!

CHAPTER TWO

THE spring, with its bursting bud and bird song, passed slowly into the sunlit days of summer. And the summer that year was of quiet beauty, almost resembling an Indian Summer. The nights were still, and the myriad stars gleamed brightly when there was no moon to shadow-colour the moorland. All wild life revelled in the long sunny days, and those creatures who moved only at night, haunted the dewy places of the heather-clad hollows. And often when the night was trailing its last dark garment across the sky, the nocturnal birds and winged bats made their final rally, to disappear when the new day hemmed the black robe of darkness with a soft pearly hue. And with the coming of the dawn, the swallows and martins would suddenly appear over the rivers, darting and turning in the dew-scented air while the clouds of early morning sailed slowly overhead. They were soon followed by the larks, winging high above the moor as if to become one with the white galleons of the sky. Then the blackbird would juggle with his notes in the thorn tree, and a thrush would whistle loud and clear in greeting.

During these months of seasonal change on Dartmoor, Greatheart became absolutely indispensable to his master, and the wild, wolf-like dog of the Mendips and Exmoor became the beloved companion of the children of Buckland. Greatheart had been reclaimed from the wild by kindness and understanding on the part of his master whom he had learnt to love with all his canine heart.

Many were the expeditions he made over the moor with Lionel. Sometimes they went fishing; sometimes just on long rambles when it seemed that Greatheart's

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master chose the spots most likely to invite the animal's curiosity.

There had been occasions when a young woman accompanied them. At first, Greatheart had been suspicious of Vivien Dayton. He was unable to interpret her exact relationship with his master. When they sat together picnicking, Greatheart would thrust his way between them, whining, and whistling through his nostrils as if to show his disapproval.

At first, Vivien did not quite know what to do to win the dog's trust. Her hazel eyes would darken, and a warm flush would creep over her cheeks.

Then, one day, on the Upper Dart, when she and Lionel were sitting in idle contemplation of the river, she suddenly took off her shoes and stockings, and laughing, began to paddle, while Greatheart—who had been sitting on his haunches regarding her with complete disapproval, suddenly stood up, his head set at an excited angle.

Somehow, Greatheart was never to forget that day. . . . It turned out to be a lovely, lovely day for him. . . . At the moment when Vivien took off her shoes, and after ruffling Lionel's hair stood down into the river with the currents eddying over her slim white ankles, Greatheart seemed to see more clearly than he had ever seen before. He saw the woods sloping down towards the river, saw the gleam of sunlight on the swiftly flowing water; saw, too, the easy manner of his master as he leant his back against a tree-trunk. But more than these, he saw the slight figure of Vivien standing out in the river, her oval face laughing up at him and her hair dishevelled by the wandering wind.

Suddenly he barked, and when she called him, he forgot all his previous displeasure, and tumbling wildly down the bank, leapt out into mid-stream to play with her. The trout, that had been sheltering under the

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boulders, darted away as his body plashed eagerly towards Vivien who was standing well out in the river. Minnows, swimming against the currents, vanished in a solid mass before even Lionel's keen eyes could mark their passing.

Indeed, a lovely, lovely day for the dog.

He never forgot the joy and light-hearted banter that followed his clumsy attempts at play, neither did he forget the laughter of the river amidst the rocks, and the calling of the thrush from somewhere in the woods. . . . And on the homeward journey, with the sun going down in the west and the new moon rising over the tors of the middle-moor, it seemed that the three of them had done this same thing before—walking as now they walked in the cool of the evening. . . .

A lovely, lovely day!

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The days of summer passed all too quickly; the resemblance they bore to an Indian Summer soon gave way to lengthening nights and misty mornings, with the swallows preparing to leave on their long and hazardous journey overseas.

No second summer for some—nor perhaps another spring!

August was a month of rumours; war appeared to be imminent. Folk in the villages had become restive, and by the time the martins had joined with the swallows, making trial flights until late in the evening, the eyes of the world were turned towards Central Europe.

Meanwhile, in Devon, the rowan and privet berries began to ripen; blackberries were thick and full-grown amidst the brambles. The chiff-chaff and the willow warbler were tuning their notes prior to departure abroad and the country-side in glowing colours was already saying farewell to summer.

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Early in the morning of the first Sunday in September, Lionel, free of farm work for the day, packed a rucksack, and with his fishing rods tucked under his arm, called Greatheart, and the two set off for a distant part of the moor where fishing was good.

It was a beautiful day. The heather on the moors was soft underfoot, and the fragrance was strong like wine. In less than an hour Lionel and Greatheart were well on their journey towards the upper reaches of the Dart. While Greatheart ran on ahead, seeking something elusive to chase, his master walked in silence. His mind was occupied with the problems that at that same hour were demanding the attention of distinguished politicians far away in London.

By eleven o'clock Lionel and Greatheart had reached the river, and the dog, lying at his master's side, watched, with sparkling eyes, the efficient way Lionel tested his rod before casting for the trout with which he hoped to fill his fishing basket.

It became very hot towards noon, and Lionel, having caught four medium-sized fish, lay under a tree, staring up at the cloud shapes.

Slowly the golden hours of the September afternoon sped by, and the momentous events that were to mould the future were already in the making. But of these there was never a sign that afternoon in the neighbourhood of the Upper Dart river. Now and again a fish would ride the currents; once or twice a trout leaped only to fall back with a resounding plash that caused the dog to prick his ears and his master to raise himself on to his elbow.

The shadows began to deepen in the water until it was no longer possible to see the boulders at the bottom of the deeper pools. . . . A heron flew slowly down-stream.

When a little later Lionel and Greatheart set off towards home, the evening had become chilly as if

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swept by the wind that had already passed over Central Europe, extinguishing one by one the lamps that had once gleamed so brightly; and when both dog and master came over the brow of the Beacon, no welcoming lamplight glimmered in the village below.

Britain was at war!

CHAPTER THREE

DESPITE the fact that Britain was at war, the next few months passed uneventfully. Here and there in the vicinity of Buckland a few familiar faces were missing, and on one or two of the more distant farms, Land Girls took over the places of the men who had joined the forces.

Christmas came without the usual celebrations that had characterized the occasion in former years. Folk seemed much occupied in what was going on abroad, but none the less, whilst abandoning outward display, made the most of the festive season within their own homes.

With the New Year, hopes ran high. The war would be over before the summer! But as the months passed by and the events abroad took an ominous turn, hope became a grim determination to fight to the finish.

Lionel, during these months, had worked hard on his farm, and a distant relative who had been rejected from the army on medical grounds had been taught to do many of the jobs Lionel himself usually did. Two Land Girls had also been drafted to the farm since much of the land was now under the plough, and Mrs. Radmore found her time more fully occupied with all the additional household duties that had suddenly been imposed upon her.

As the weeks passed Mrs. Radmore noticed that her son had become just a little morose. She spoke to Vivien about it, but although she too had noticed that Lionel had become very silent of late, she had to confess that she had no idea what was actually troubling him.

Then one morning Lionel rose earlier than usual, remarking at breakfast that he proposed going into Princetown. He saddled his favourite mare, and, after

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telling Greatheart to look after the farm, mounted and rode off.

Greatheart was puzzled. He could not understand why his master did not want him to accompany him. As he listened to the beating of the mare's hooves, hearing them become less distinct as the distance increased, Greatheart found himself possessed of a sudden desire to follow. He stared down the highway, then like a flash he leapt the wall that bordered the lane, and taking a short cut across the fields, by-passed the village and, from a ridge of high ground, saw his master riding leisurely along the road leading to Poundsgate.

The dog stood for a long while watching, his eagerness to follow becoming less keen as he became aware of a sense of guilt for having disobeyed his master's commands. Then when Lionel had disappeared from sight behind a clump of trees, Greatheart—more than ever conscious that he had disobeyed his master—turned, and went back disconsolately to the farm.

It was sundown before Radmore reached New Bridge on his journey home. The evening had grown very still. He wondered how many more evenings were left to him. Not many, he supposed. The recruiting officer at Princetown had said that he would be receiving his notice to report in a week or so. A week or so! Just long enough, he supposed, to get things in order at the farm. He felt that the farm would be adequately served by those who were now working on it. There would be little cause to worry on that account.

He reined in the mare on the crown of the bridge. High up, a fresh wind must have been blowing, for clouds were racing over the granite-strewn summits of the tors, but on the bridge it was so very still—certainly no touch of the wind so close to the earth. . . .

Along the moorland road, mysterious and almost indistinct in the gathering twilight, an old farmer was

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approaching, walking beside a shaggy, Dartmoor pony. As he passed Lionel, he said, "Good evenun to 'ee, mi dear."

And before Lionel could answer, he had gone, and only the steady beating of the pony's feet could be heard.

Suddenly there was a scuffle, and a lithe shape came bounding up the road.

"Greatheart!" Lionel cried. "Greatheart!"

The animal's eyes shone with happiness, and his master was aware of having come home. . . .

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Lionel had exactly two weeks before he received his papers to report.

They arrived one morning by the early post, and he found to his surprise that he was expected to report in Plymouth within forty-eight hours. That left him so little time to do the remainder of the things he had in mind. Nevertheless, he managed to spend one last evening walking across the moor with Greatheart.

It was a cool evening, with the sun already low on the western skyline.

Both dog and man climbed up to the Beacon, and Lionel, sitting on one of the many boulders that marked the summit of the tor, lit his pipe and stared away across the hills, while Greatheart—happy to be with his master—squatted on his haunches, his eyes fixed intently on Lionel's face.

A few late crows were winging slowly homeward; down in one of the hollows, the sheep were moving up towards an outcrop of rock for shelter. The evening star had appeared, and the misty blueness of twilight began to creep up the hills.

At last Lionel and Greatheart began their journey

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together towards Buckland. Lionel was strangely silent, feeling in his heart the sudden bitterness of doing a thing for what might be the last time. Only Greatheart seemed content; he ran on with waving tail, and eyes shining. . . . For him, there would always be another tomorrow. . . .

They stopped for a moment or two beneath the old thorn tree, Lionel thinking of the day when he discovered the dog lying beneath it. He drew deeply at his pipe, then sighed.

The sky was now full of stars; there was a slight ground mist creeping stealthily up the flank of the hill. In the silence, it seemed that all the world was breathing, while the old thorn tree listened. . . .

Lionel again drew deeply at his pipe. He thought, "The tree will be here when I'm gone . . . and the stars will always be as bright . . ."

Greatheart, as if wondering at the strange mood of his master, thrust his cold nose into the man's hand. He then looked up into Lionel's face. Radmore patted the dog's sleek head, and the two went slowly down the hill towards the farmhouse in the valley.

When they had gone, and the scent of tobacco smoke had departed from the damp night air, only the scent of the thorn tree lingered, almost like a half-forgotten memory.

An hour after dawn the following day, Lionel had left the farm. Greatheart, who had been kept shut away in one of the upper rooms, heard his footsteps going across the yard.

He whined as he stood gazing through the window, and when he could no longer see his master's figure, he listened intently until the footsteps had died away into silence.

All that day Greatheart sulked. He felt he had been cheated out of a walk with his master.

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When night came, and Lionel did not put in an appearance, he pawed the door and whined. Mrs. Radmore, who understood only too well what the animal was experiencing, put him on a leash and took him for a walk towards Buckland. He trotted eagerly at her side, his ears erect as he tested the air, expecting to meet his master at every bend in the lane.

When they eventually retraced their steps, Greatheart walked with a curious slouching movement. His ears were no longer erect as if he knew that his master would not be returning home that night.

For the next few days, Greatheart never went out unless he were on a leash. Lionel's mother feared that if permitted to run free, he would wander off in search of her son. But the dog eventually became used to Lionel being away from home, although when he was allowed to go out alone, never a day went by but what he did not go to the old thorn tree on the hillside, and stare away into the distance as if fully expecting to see his master suddenly coming across the moor.

After ten days or so Greatheart again resumed his normal farm duties, working with a will as if anxious to carry out satisfactorily the work for which he had been trained.

By now, the autumn was fast giving way to the bleak aspect of winter, and the whole moorland surrounding Buckland became grey and misty, with sudden squalls of rain sweeping over the tors and filling the streams that swept sullenly downhill on their way to join the sea.

It was during the second week in November that Lionel obtained his first leave. The first indication that the son of the house was expected home was shown in the sudden bustling about on the part of Mrs. Radmore who kept looking out of the kitchen window, and thus roused Greatheart's curiosity.

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When he got under her feet as she hurried to and from the pantry, she told him to get out of her way; then remembering what he had meant to Lionel, she suddenly knelt down and took the dog's head between her palms, murmuring, "Your master will soon be home!"

Greatheart waved his tail, and looked up at her with understanding. Some instinct, deep down in him, told him that it was indeed Lionel who was expected, and when later he lay out in the porch, his ears were strained to catch the first sound of the footsteps he knew so well.

He must have dozed while he waited, for it seemed that he heard Lionel's voice first, and as he jumped to his feet, saw his master already at the farm gate.

With a wild bound he leaped across the yard, and as Lionel thwacked his sides and romped with him, it seemed to the dog that it was only yesterday that his master had gone away, so suddenly had the world changed for him.

Lionel's leave was very short—just forty-eight hours—but during that time he managed to spend an afternoon on the moor with Greatheart and Vivien, and the dog felt that the old days had returned, despite the cold wind that blew inland from the north-west.

Greatheart forgot all the loneliness he had experienced during his master's absence, and when he came upon a yellow-hammer, and heard the bird calling, "Little-bit-of-bread-and-no-chee-ee-se," he looked around at Lionel and Vivien with dog laughter issuing from his panting jaws. And they laughed with him, until the bird, annoyed at the interruption, took wing and vanished over the hill.

When on their homeward journey they came upon an isolated moorland tarn, they stopped and stared into the peaty-brown water. Lionel and Vivien smiled back at each other through their reflections in the tarn, and were surprised when their images suddenly dwindled



"It was a very dejected Greatheart who lay on the window-seat"



and lost shape, as a huge cormorant skimmed the surface of the small lake and set off across the moor with Greatheart giving chase.

That night the dog slept soundly before the kitchen fire, and in his sleep his limbs twitched as he again gave chase to the cormorant, and heard the little yellow-hammer saying, "Little-bit-of-bread-and-no-chee-ee-see."

But he was roused very early. Lionel was up and about, prior to taking a final look over the farm.

Greatheart accompanied him on his tour, seeing his khaki-clad figure inspecting first one thing, then another, and listening to his voice as he explained to the Land Girls some particular job he wanted given special attention.

At last the inspection of the farm was over, and Lionel and Greatheart returned to the house for dinner.

Before the evening shadows had deepened over the moor, Lionel had gone once again, and it was a very dejected Greatheart who lay on the window-seat in the kitchen listening for steps he knew would not be returning.

Next morning the window-seat was deserted.

During the night Greatheart had discovered a way of getting out, and he had gone to find the master who was clad in a khaki-coloured suit.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE morning was grey. There was a drift of rain in the air. Seagulls, which had flown inland owing to the severe Atlantic weather, rose and fell over the middle moor. Where the clouds drifted low over the castle-like tors, all familiar landmarks became lost, and to the dog who loped along the winding road that ran from east to west, it seemed as if he were treading the highway that led only to misty confusion.

Suddenly the dog stopped, his nostrils twitching as he sensed a strain in the wind currents. He appeared undecided as to what he should do. In his deep chest his heart beat steadily, and his eyes held a light that quickened with excitement as he once again tested the wind.

After a moment or so, the animal crossed to a gap in the rough stone wall that skirted the moorland, and then stood alert on the heather-clad slope beyond.

He still continued to test the wind, and the scent he had found in it seemed stronger.

Suddenly his body became curiously alive as he quivered with a strange excitement.

He saw a group of men coming across the moor. They came nearer, walking with that precision so typical of soldiering. Greatheart waited with eager anticipation expressed in his stance.

The officer leading the group saw the dog and wondered why he was waiting so patiently.

As the soldiers marched on, Greatheart became somewhat wistful. His master was not amongst them.

So marked was the disappointment in his eyes that one of the men spoke to the dog as he passed, and

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Greatheart, pricking his ears as if coming to a sudden decision, began to follow.

At first the soldiers took little notice of the dog following at their rear, and it was not until Greatheart had been travelling with the column for the best part of an hour that the officer in charge called a halt and told the animal to go back home.

Greatheart stood a little distance off and looked up to the man as he spoke.

"He seems lost, sir," said one of the men.

The officer called the dog, and Greatheart went up to him readily enough, and stood passively while the man read the name engraved on his collar.

"Greatheart!" he remarked. Then shaking his head, he added: "Probably his name . . . There's no address."

When the soldiers resumed the march, Greatheart accompanied them, and while they felt sorry for him, thinking that he had wandered away from his home, the dog himself was pleased to be with them, hoping that soon they would lead him to his master.

For the next few days Greatheart was the guest of any army camp situated less than ten miles from Buckland; then because dogs of his type were required to train for guard work, he was taken to Plymouth and after being muzzled placed in the care of a railway official and sent to the Army Dogs' Training School in Gloucester.

The long train journey bored him, and when he finally arrived at his destination, he was quite indifferent to the soldier who was waiting on the platform to take him off to the school.

His reception at the camp did not improve his somewhat sullen manner. He was first examined by the Veterinary Surgeon, who classed him "an excellent animal". When he was finally taken off to the kennel

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that had been allotted to him, he found himself housed close to three other animals who had arrived but a few days before.

Greatheart was kept under close observation for almost a fortnight, being exercised on a leash and learning that here he was part of a military unit and not an individual.

At the end of the second week, when it was decided that he could commence his training, he was moved to another part of the camp where he met many other dogs similar to himself.

That evening as twilight crept down and night came on, Greatheart lay outside his kennel, listening to the distant sounds of the camp, and for the first time since he had left Buckland, he longed for the quietness of the farmhouse, with the firelight glimmering on things that had become so familiar to him. And as memory brought to life so many of the things he had enjoyed with Lionel, so did he experience a strange vacancy inside him, and with it, the desire for the rippling waters of the Dart and the trees under which he loved to lie while his master was fishing.

There was no man here who could take the place of Lionel. . . . Each was but a part of something that possessed life only when the voice of authority commanded attention. There was no freedom . . . no moments when he could indulge his fancies by racing under the moon.

As if fretful because he was chained to the kennel, Greatheart rose, yawned, and stretched himself. And one of the trainers, making his last night inspection of the kennels, watched him and then commanded him to lie down.

Greatheart obeyed, knowing the man to be one of the overlords to whom he now owed allegiance and respect.

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An hour later, the sound of a distant bugle note told the dog that all was well.

Next morning he started his training as a novice.

He was one of a team of eight, and his handler was a member of the Royal Air Force. Being led by somebody in a grey-blue uniform did not suit Greatheart. He had noticed that one of the other dogs was under the control of a man in khaki, and Greatheart, remembering his master and the uniform he wore, wanted to be with the soldier who was clad as Lionel had been clad when last the dog saw him.

The trainer, in charge of the team noticed Greatheart's reluctance to work with the R.A.F. handler, and being well versed in canine psychology, could not fail to see how the dog continually strained to be near the soldier in khaki.

Dogs were supposed to be colour-blind, and the trainer began to wonder if there was any truth in this. Greatheart's preference for the soldier was shown by his willingness to learn and obey when his R.A.F. handler was changed and he passed into the custody of the man in army battle-dress.

The trainer, who knew that Greatheart had attached himself to a party of troops in Devonshire, felt he had made a discovery. The dog had followed the column because he was intent on finding somebody who had joined the army, and that could only be one person—his master.

As the days passed by, Greatheart proved to be an exceptionally clever animal. He soon acquired an efficiency that surprised even the trainer who was used to some dogs showing a keener degree of intelligence than others.

When much that was considered preliminary training had been completed, and Greatheart was accorded honours in walking to heel, sitting when commanded,

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and lying flat with his handler out of sight, he was passed on to the next phase in the training that was calculated to turn him into an excellent guard-dog.

Greatheart had a liking for his handler. The soldier, from a west country regiment, spoke with the same intonation the dog had often heard in his master's voice, and Greatheart was anxious to obey him in all things, sensing obscurely that perhaps one day the man would take him to the one person in the world he wished to find. Not for one moment did Greatheart falter in his determination to discover the whereabouts of Lionel.

Often when his day's work was over, the dog would lie outside his kennel, his ears pricked to the sound of voices, and always was he trying to find amongst them the voice that would bring him excited to his feet.

The trainer, despite his admiration for Greatheart, secretly thought him a little dull when he was off duty. The animal seldom showed any inclination for play, and whenever an inspection was made of the kennels, whilst Greatheart joined in the chorus of barking at the approach of a stranger, he never showed the same eagerness for praise as did some of the other dogs. He remained aloof, and more than ever did the trainer consider him an animal who had accepted his training only as a means of attaining that upon which he had set his heart.

During the next week or so, Greatheart worked with a team of dogs, patrolling an area which it would have been impossible to guard without the aid of animals specially trained for the purpose. The training then moved on to its final stage—that of guarding what was presumed to be an important factory site, and when some unauthorized person entered the area, the dogs soon learnt to locate him by scent alone. Then, when commanded by their handlers, the dogs went in to the attack.

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Greatheart became almost a specialist in this form of work. He could act more swiftly than his companions, seizing the suspect by the arm and holding him down until his handler appeared. He was also a good tracker, and by working with one man alone, soon developed an understanding with his handler that resulted in the two acting almost by intuition.

At last came the day when Greatheart and his handler were drafted to the area of their future activities. This had been chosen for them by the trainer who, having made all possible enquiries about the dog, had persuaded the authorities to send the pair to an important depot in the Plymouth area. By so doing, the trainer considered the dog would be back on familiar ground, and perhaps one day achieve that upon which he had so obviously set his heart. . . . A long shot, maybe. . . . But one never knew. . . . A miracle might happen.

When Greatheart departed for his new job, his handler promised to keep in touch with the trainer and let him know how the dog got on.

And so, Greatheart—now a highly trained army dog—returned to that part of the country where he belonged.

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Springtime was coming once again to Devon.

In the clumps of woodland that bordered the lanes, there was evident a singular activity amongst the birds. Already the trees had become pliable as the life-giving sap stirred in their widespread limbs. The alders, growing close to the banks of many downward coursing streams, were full of young buds, and in some of the more sheltered valleys the wild cherry was already white with blossom. Wood anemones, with small, creamy white flowers, were making their annual appearance in the thickets that lay at the foot of the hills, while

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up on the commons and moors the whin bushes began to gleam with sudden splashes of gold, and wild violets and primroses were appearing where the shelving hills afforded protection from the wind.

And so, with many attempts to outshine former seasons, the second spring of a country at war, came creeping over the Cornish border, and with it—the wind of destruction that came from overseas.

Greatheart and his handler found themselves stationed at an army depot situated in what was known as Austin Fort in the Crown Hill district of Plymouth. The fort—a relic of former times—was being used as an important store and experimental station for what later was to be generally known as “Radar”.

It was an isolated spot, and Greatheart and his soldier companion were expected to patrol the fort area at regular intervals.

The first few days passed pleasantly enough. There was nothing to disturb the peacefulness of the scene save the coming and going of lorries, and the voices of men raised in laughter as jokes were passed from one to another.

Then on the eve of the first day of spring it happened—the thing that, within the next few days, was to make ruins of many historical buildings in the nearby city, and render homeless many who had already given up much for the cause of freedom.

Just after dusk rose the mournful wail of an air-raid siren. Then one by one, others were heard sounding from different parts of the city. Over on Mount Batten and on Mount Edgcumbe swept the strong beams of searchlights cleaving the darkness. Out at sea, sudden spurts of gunfire lit up the horizon, and points of light broke and vanished where there ought to have been stars.

Then in came the raiders—at first flying low over

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the sea, then sweeping upwards to avoid the barrage balloons over the city. The guns became more insistent; searchlights from various strategic spots—seeming, from Crown Hill, like ribbons of gold—probed the skies for the enemy 'planes. From the centre of the city a wavering, crimson glow told of an immense fire. Above the roar of conflict could be heard the distant clanging of fire-bells as a district call was circulated. And still the raiders came in, despite the heavy barrage that turned the heavens into an inferno of flame and awe-inspiring starlight.

Time, that usually passed all too quickly, seemed endless, and when the gunfire died away as the last of the raiders disappeared over the sea, so broke the last of the starlight flashes in the heavens until the sky itself grew dark save where banks of cloud reflected the glow of the fires raging in the city below.

Greatheart stood up very well indeed to this—his first real baptism of warfare. Both he and his handler were out on patrol during the whole of the attack, and only retired from duty when the last of the sirens sounded the "all clear".

Next day, a cloud of smoke hung over Plymouth; lorries returning to the fort from the city were delayed on account of obstruction. The drivers spoke of heavy damage.

An hour or so before nightfall, people began to come from all parts, intent on spending the night in the open. Some left earlier in the day for the barren wastes of Dartmoor.

Then, on the evening of the first day of spring, came the second assault on the neighbourhood of the Three Towns—the raiders seeming to take up the attack at a point where they had left off during the early hours of that same morning.

One 'plane, flying low over the area of Mutley,

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seemed caught in the heavy barrage of gunfire, and in an effort to escape, the pilot released his full load of bombs.

Tremendous crashes shook even the fort up on Crown Hill. Greatheart—once again on duty—flinched as he heard the bombs whistling down. He looked up at his handler. The soldier patted him on the head and whispered: "It's all right, pal. It will soon be over."

Suddenly they heard their names being called. A sentry came hurrying up, and Greatheart growled.

"The major wants you at once," the man remarked.

Greatheart's companion gave a brief reply, and a few minutes later the dog found himself in a small room situated deep in the heart of the fort, and listened with pricked ears to the conversation that was taking place between the elderly major and his handler.

The major had received an urgent 'phone message. Not a great distance away, a gun-site had been hit by a bomb, and part of the nearby barracks had been demolished. The major had been asked to send the dog to the scene in an endeavour to locate some of the men who were believed buried beneath the rubble.

"Can your dog do that?" Greatheart's handler was asked.

"He's not been trained for it, sir," was the answer.

"Well, take him along and see. There's a lorry waiting."

The soldier saluted, and calling the dog to heel, left for what he considered was a futile experiment.

In less than twenty minutes they had reached their destination. As they got down from the lorry, accompanied by an officer from the fort, the "all clear" sounded.

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In silence, they crossed over to what was left of the right wing of the barracks.

"We've accounted for all but two," the guide remarked as they approached the ruins.

Soldiers, working under the glare of acetylene flares, were digging in the debris while first-aid men stood by ready to render what assistance might be necessary.

"Go to it. . . . See what the dog can do," the officer remarked hopelessly.

With a feeling of helplessness, Greatheart's handler bade him seek.

The dog looked at him, not quite understanding what he was expected to find.

"Seek!" said the soldier again.

Greatheart moved forward, while the men who had been digging leant on their picks and watched. The dog whined as some splintered glass pierced the pads of his feet. But he continued to creep forward, sniffing as he went.

Suddenly he stopped, his body taut, his head set, after the manner of a pointer scenting game.

"Dig there!" commanded the officer.

The soldiers set about the task with a good show of determination.

Not five minutes later they had located one of their comrades, buried beneath the rubble at the very spot indicated by the dog.

As they carried the man away, the officer was watching Greatheart.

The animal had become distressed. There was something here that worried him . . . some vague, almost undefinable scent he had known before. . . . He whined, and as his handler gave him a greater length of leash, he moved gently forward, his whole body quivering with a curious excitement. The scent was stronger, while in his

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heart was a sense of fear . . . fear for somebody he knew. . . . The whine in his throat changed to a broken cry . . . almost like a human being in pain.

Soldiers who had been whispering amongst themselves were commanded to be silent.

Greatheart continued to move forward, his handler following a little distance in the rear. A few yards behind him came the officer—his interest being such that he felt something of momentous importance was about to take place.

The officer gave a sudden gasp and caught the arm of the dog's handler.

Greatheart had stopped. He was silent now; his ears were erect and his tail slightly plumed. His nose was testing the atmosphere. The fret deep down in him had passed even the point of distress; it now bordered on panic.

Then he knew. . . .

He gave a deep bark, and suddenly commenced to dig furiously, whining in a way that betrayed his acute distress.

Both the officer and the handler ran to the dog's assistance. They pulled at the leash, but the dog refused to leave the cavity that attracted his attention, and continued to dig with his forepaws, still whining and intent only on discovering that which lay buried beneath the debris.

It was with a deal of difficulty that Greatheart was eventually pulled away from the spot and soldiers commenced to dig.

All the while the dog stood quivering, his eyes never leaving the spot where he had made his discovery.

An exclamation from one of the soldiers caused the others to cease their activities.

At the same moment, Greatheart lunged forward, dragging his handler with him. An instant later he lay



"He gave a deep bark, and suddenly commenced to dig furiously"



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beside the soldier who had been buried beneath the rubble. He was licking the man's face, and whimpering, refusing to obey his handler whom he had hitherto obeyed in accordance with his army training.

Greatheart had found his master!

CHAPTER FIVE

THERE was no wind, and the last hour before dawn seemed darker than any that had preceded it.

Greatheart, as he lay unsleeping in his kennel, was aware of the deep silence in which he could hear the heavy pounding of his heart. Every now and then a tremor passed through him and he gave a whine of distress. The events of the night were so clearly mirrored in his animal consciousness that there were moments when sheer panic swept through him, causing him to stir restlessly and fret at the chain that kept him prisoner.

At last he could bear no longer the inactivity that was slowly crushing his spirit. He stood up and began to bark. His deep voice echoed across the hills, and not many minutes later his handler appeared, none too pleased at having been roused from sleep.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he shouted angrily.

Greatheart backed slowly into a corner of his kennel, a silent snarl wrinkling his lips.

The man flashed a torch beam on him and saw his gleaming fangs. Knowing the dog to be usually of a kindly disposition, the soldier could not understand the animal's present mood. He dropped to one knee and tried to entice Greatheart to come to him.

But only a low growl greeted his efforts. At last the fellow went away, wondering if the dog were not a little crazy.

Next day when Greatheart refused to work, and kept continually straining to reach the road that wound past the fort, his handler decided to report the matter to the major.

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The major listened to what he had to say, and then remarked:

"It's your job to see that the dog does as he's told."

"You can't force him, sir. Either he does his job spontaneously or he's no good!"

"I see."

The officer who had accompanied Greatheart and his handler to the barracks the previous night was next summoned, and the discussion continued on more delicate lines. To the major's surprise, the officer stated with emphasis that in his opinion the reason for Greatheart's disobedience was due to the fact that one of the men he had rescued was in some way connected with him.

At first the major refused to believe such a thing possible, and then, having heard from the dog's handler how Greatheart had attached himself to a column of men marching back to camp, he agreed that there might be something in what the junior officer said.

The result was that same afternoon, after preliminary arrangements had been made, Greatheart was taken to the military hospital where his master was now an inmate.

Lionel had recovered consciousness, but it was feared that his eye-sight had become seriously impaired by the bomb-blast. The doctor in charge of the case listened sympathetically to what the dog's handler and the young officer had to say, and eventually permitted the animal to be taken to the ward where Lionel was.

"If it's as you say," the doctor remarked, "you had better let the dog off the lead and see if he can pick the fellow out from amongst the others!"

As the three men traversed the long corridor leading to the ward, Greatheart walked quietly at their heels. For the first time that day he was off the leash, and

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whilst at first he half turned to run away, some strange impulse, contrary to the desire to flee, made him suddenly responsive to the wishes of those to whom he had hitherto owed allegiance. His mind, in that moment of indecision, was pulled and urged by something that told him that here—in this building—was his master! Yet there was no scent of the man he wished to see . . . nothing save an odour that, to the dog's nostrils, was nauseating and reminded him vaguely of the great darkness in which life and movement were taken away, never to return. Yet neither impulse nor reason directed his actions. When he heard his handler say, "Follow," he did so, instinctively.

The young officer watched him out of the corner of his eye. He saw the dog's sudden impulse to run off the moment he was released from the leash, saw too the look that came into the animal's eyes, and his immediate reaction to the handler's command to follow.

No knowledge of canine psychology revealed these things to him. He just saw them, and having dogs of his own suddenly knew that the soul of Greatheart whilst curiously expectant, was yet lonely for that which it could not understand.

The doctor was more concerned with the problem of his patient than in the nature of the experiment he had sanctioned, although he too felt that it would turn out to be more than just idle speculation.

They entered the ward where two rows of beds gave an appearance of regimental uniformity to the clean whiteness of the hall-like room.

Greatheart hesitated the instant he entered, and the three men stood by the door watching him, as did two of the nurses and some of the patients.

The dog's handler whispered, "Seek!"

Greatheart looked at him and began to test the air. But the same sweet odour, so reminiscent of hospitals,

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was here too, and it obliterated any other scent that might be apparent to the dog.

The animal then walked slowly past the long rows of beds. He did not quite understand the reason for so many beds from which men watched him with a curious insistence. It was all so perplexing; moreover, he could scent nothing that might aid him, even if he knew what it was he was expected to find. Yet, something deep down in his animal being urged him on until he had passed every single bed in the ward, and had commenced to return towards the door.

"He's failed," the doctor whispered.

Greatheart, by now, was half-way up the ward. He glanced at one or two of the wounded men as he passed, sniffed the outstretched hand of one of the nurses, and then began to sniff at the floor as if seeking some clue that had perhaps escaped him.

Suddenly somebody coughed.

Like a flash, Greatheart wheeled around, his head held high and his eyes alive with an uncanny, almost dancing light. Then he seemed to crouch low and moved forward. There was fear in his gait, as if he were afraid of being disappointed. But he moved in a straight line, going towards the bed where a man lay with the upper part of his face hidden by bandages.

The doctor had commenced to come quietly down the ward. The dog heard his approaching footsteps, but did not look round. He continued straight on, his tail feathered, his steps very, very slow. When within touch of the bed, he tested the air, and gave a soft, questioning cry before he rested his head near the hand of the man who, on hearing the dog's broken cry, uttered one word:

"*Greatheart!*"

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GREATHEART

That same evening, three men sat in the major's office at Austin Fort discussing Greatheart's future.

"The animal is an army dog and has his duty to do," the major said.

"But what if he continues to remain disobedient to his handler's commands?" the young junior officer remarked.

The major grunted.

"Do you think that likely?" he said, addressing the dog's handler.

"I do, sir!"

The major stared thoughtfully at the desk before which he sat.

"You say the dog was reluctant to leave this blind man?" he said at last.

"We had almost to drag him away," the officer answered.

The major shook his head and sighed. Despite the fact that all his life he had been schooled to complete discipline, the major had to admire the dog's singleness of mind, and knew that both the junior officer and Greatheart's handler were absolutely right in their assumption that the dog would never again be useful for army work. Better to admit it now than wage a ceaseless fight with the animal.

He shook his head once again and pressed the tips of his fingers on the polished surface of the desk. And as he realized that the dog had beaten them, he seemed to see Greatheart as he had seen him but a few days before—patrolling the fort, eager to do his job well, ready to fight if the need be for the man who had been elected to be his handler. Now . . .

For one brief moment the major was conscious of a keen resentment for the man who was undoubtedly Greatheart's master; then remembering the fellow's

terrible affliction, he murmured: "Poor devil! Blind! What a life for him now."

The junior officer overheard the major's remark.

"Greatheart would make an ideal guide dog," he said slowly.

The major looked hard at the young officer.

"Do you really think he could be trained to act as a guide dog for his master?" he asked.

"I do, sir. That dog has brains, and I think I am right in saying that for his master he would do anything."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

The junior officer, who had already discussed the matter with Greatheart's handler, was not slow in putting forward the best solution for the dog's future, and next day a detailed report was sent to the appropriate authorities while a duplicate copy was mailed to the Army Dogs' Training School in Gloucester.

In the meantime, Greatheart fretted in his kennel. He refused to carry on with his usual routine, and since this resulted in his handler being temporarily relieved of his patrol work, the fellow did what he could to make the dog less despondent, taking him for long walks up into the hills, but never daring to leave the animal off the leash in case he ran away.

Greatheart seemed to realize that his handler bore him no ill-will. Whilst he accepted as a matter of diversion those long walks on the end of a leash, always there existed deep down in him a dumb craving to be with his master, and he seemed to wait with extreme cunning for the moment when his handler would forget to keep him on a leash and he would be free to track off in search of his master.

But the moment never came! The soldier guessed what was in the dog's mind, and took precautionary measures to ensure the animal was never in a position to run off.

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Greatheart was taken once again to see his master, and his reluctance to leave was again touching and unbelievably sincere. It was more obvious than ever that the dog would never again respond to his army training.

In less than a week, a new dog and handler arrived at the fort, and Greatheart was officially released from further military duty. His soldier companion was, however, to remain at the fort until such time Greatheart was either sent back to his home in Buckland or to the Guide Dog School.

Enquiries had already been made concerning the dog, and Radmore, who was now undergoing examination by an eye specialist, had assured the authorities that Greatheart was his, and requested that the animal be returned to his home.

The young officer who had interviewed Lionel had returned to the fort wondering a little at the hopeless state of the blind man's mind. Radmore had obviously little hope of ever seeing again, despite the non-committal opinion of the specialist who had examined him.

Lionel's insistence that Greatheart, if discharged from further military duty, should be sent home, had certainly presented a problem for the officer to settle. He had already been instrumental in getting the dog's original trainer in Gloucester sufficiently interested to recommend the animal to the Guide Dog School in Leamington, and whilst he wished to do what Lionel suggested, he could not rid his mind of the idea that Greatheart would be of greater service to his master if trained as a Guide Dog.

There was some doubt as to whether Greatheart would be satisfactory for this type of work, particularly as he had been subject to rigorous army duty. Still, the Director in charge at the school agreed to see the dog, his interest having been roused when informed of Great-

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heart's complete devotion to his master who had met with such utter misfortune.

Within a week of the new guard dog's arrival at the fort, it was generally known that Greatheart's master was unlikely to see again, and would either have to depend on a stick to guide him, or place his complete trust in a dog.

This news decided Greatheart's new career.

The young officer took the responsibility of Greatheart on his own shoulders, and a few days later when the animal's handler was requested to report back to Gloucester, he took the dog with him, having been instructed to leave Greatheart at Leamington where he was to become a prospective candidate for the most important work a dog was expected to perform—that of being the "seeing eye" for one who might never see again.

The soldier's last impression of Greatheart was one which he felt he would never forget.

He saw him standing beside a rather tall, lean-faced man who had already won the dog's esteem by talking to him kindly and sympathetically. Not a great distance away was a blind airman learning to have complete trust in a Shepherd Dog who was leading him along the path that was the preliminary training ground.

Greatheart's old handler turned away. He had seen the guide dog look up at his master as if silently asking for some appreciation. He saw the fellow's face taut and almost expressionless, saw his sightless eyes that stared with such a marked fixity of purpose, saw too how his hand gripped almost tenaciously the animal's harness. . . . And that harness! Soon it would be the insignia of Greatheart's future life-long service to his master. . . . No more play for him save on those rare moments when Lionel would be resting. . . . No more hunting after the easy, questing manner of his kind. . . . Nothing . . . just

GREATHEART

service day in and day out, and all because he had given his heart to one man who now needed him as man had seldom needed a dog before. . . .

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The soldier knew that even as Greatheart had been a grand army dog, he would be an even greater guide dog.

He was made that way!

CHAPTER SIX

THE trainer in charge of the School of Guide Dogs for the Blind immediately felt an admiration for Greatheart. He was undoubtedly a magnificent-looking animal, but it seemed hardly likely that he could be turned into a guide dog. Since becoming part of an army unit, it seemed that he had even lost the way of walking like an ordinary animal. He appeared to be nothing better than a highly-trained soldier. Just to look at him, it was obvious that he could be formidable either in attack or defence. On the very first day of his entrance into the school, the trainer had an excellent insight into the dog's qualities and prowess. Despite the fact that he was in a strange place and resented the change in his surroundings, when commanded, he showed how well he could leap. With a curious cat-like agility that told of exceptional reserves of strength, he scaled a high wall with what seemed effortless ease.

It was doubtful if Greatheart possessed any sense of fun; the severe army training had left its mark on him, seeming to have taken all natural joy and spontaneity out of him.

The trainer shook his head and wondered. This same animal, he had been told, had shown great affection for his master, going to the extent of refusing to obey the handler to whom he had hitherto been attached when by accident he had come across that master maimed and unable to help himself.

After the first day, when Greatheart lay sulking in his kennel, the trainer sat down in his small office and went through the reports concerning the animal, and being a man with an uncanny knowledge of reactionary dogs, and one who was thorough in his methods, he had to

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admit that the chances of success were very remote.

Still, as at the moment there was a shortage of dogs to train, he decided to do his best, and see if Greatheart could not be turned into an animal worthy of the traditions associated with the School of Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Meanwhile, Lionel had been informed that Greatheart was to be trained as a guide dog, and after much persuasion on the part of his doctor, agreed to let the animal remain at the school, and to go there himself at a later date to learn how best to adapt his senses to the needs brought about by his affliction.

At Lionel's request, the doctor wrote to the trainer at the school, and the letter was couched in such terms that the recipient became more than ever determined to do his best.

In the meantime, Greatheart was wondering what it was all about. He knew that he had been taken far from his master and resented having to learn new methods which, in the light of his army training, seemed contrary to all he had previously been taught. The first thing that surprised him was the fact that instead of walking to heel, he was expected to walk ahead of his handler, and to work in crowded streets which he detested. Yet, he did attempt to do what he was told for no better reason than that the work was different from that which he did at the fort.

It took him some little time to acquire the habit of leading his handler, and whilst he eventually did the work reasonably well, the trainer did not consider him too reliable. Whenever he saw a cat he was inclined to give chase, which would be dangerous should he be in charge of a man actually blind. Moreover, he was exceedingly sulky, never showing such animation and certainly none of the enthusiasm that had characterized his army work.

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The trainer was on the point of giving up when the unexpected happened. It was on the morning when the man was blind-folded and giving the dog his last opportunity of becoming useful in guide work.

Greatheart was leading him along the crowded main street, halting at cross-roads, and doing in a half-hearted manner what he should be doing with keenness and insight. The trainer, although being followed by another specialist in guide work, did not feel too secure. He never knew what Greatheart might do next, yet he seemed to be making few mistakes. But the man was conscious of uncertainty—a thing he knew to be fateful for anybody who must have complete reliance in the dog who was leading him.

Greatheart took him around an obstruction in the pavement, and he murmured, "Good!" Once the dog even sniffed the hand that gripped the harness, and the trainer again felt a certain pleasure in knowing that Greatheart was aware of doing something really important.

Then it happened.

The trainer, who was familiar with the district and wished to return to the school by another route, said quietly, "Left!" and expected the dog to respond at once and lead him along the side turning they had just reached.

Greatheart did indeed half turn, and then suddenly reared up on hind legs and sent his handler stumbling backwards. An instant later there was a crash as a barrel fell from a lorry that was being backed into a narrow alley between a shop and small warehouse.

Startled, and badly shaken, the man tore the bandage from his eyes, and saw the dog looking up into his face as if to say: "I couldn't go on. . . . We should have been killed. . . ."

By the time the deputy had arrived, the trainer was

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patting Greatheart and saying: "Good fellow! You did the right thing . . ." and there was that in his voice which brought the old light back to the dog's eyes, and caused him to wave his tail and show enthusiasm.

That night the trainer wrote to Lionel's doctor and reported that, in his opinion, the dog would succeed, adding that his former gloomy observations had been confounded by the animal's natural initiative. The incident had wakened Greatheart to his new responsibilities, and the trainer considered that his lack of enthusiasm had been due to the fact that he felt he had been taken away from the master he loved so much.

From that very day Greatheart's work progressed in a way that was surprising. He learnt quickly what other dogs had taken some little time to achieve, and by the time Lionel was ready to visit the school for his part of the training, Greatheart was reasonably proficient, and with a little care, might prove better than many another dog who had started the course with less disadvantages.

Still, his trainer sensed that there was yet something lacking. What it was, he could not rightly determine, unless it were the fact that the animal was still quietly fretting for his master.

Then came the morning when Lionel and his mother arrived at the school.

Mrs. Radmore had been much distressed when first she visited her son in hospital. When she heard that Greatheart, whom she had thought dead, had been instrumental in discovering Lionel when he was buried beneath the rubble of the demolished barracks, she was so perplexed that she was unable to permit herself to speak of the animal.

One of the trainer's assistants met them at the station, and it was arranged that on the way to the school they should pass Greatheart doing his work as a guide dog.

The assistant saw the dog and his handler coming

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along, the man blindfolded and obviously completely relying on Greatheart for his safety.

Mrs. Radmore gave a short cry when she beheld the dog, but the assistant shook his head and cautioned her with his fingers on his lips to remain silent.

This was to be the dog's greatest test, and by it, he would succeed or fail as a guide dog.

Greatheart, having reached a kerb, stood back a little, pressing himself against his trainer's leg as a car took the corner somewhat erratically. Then with a swift glance up at his handler, he moved forward, the man following with confidence.

They reached the opposite kerb, and continued on, approaching nearer to Lionel and his mother, while the assistant watched for the moment when the dog would fail to lead his handler and make a break for his master.

Greatheart guided his handler with care and obvious consideration for his welfare, once glancing up at him as if to reassure him that all was well.

Suddenly his tail feathered; his ears went up and an eager light glowed in his eyes. For one short instant he quickened his pace . . . one foot was raised as if to suddenly dash forward. . . .

Then Greatheart hesitated and stopped, his body pressed against the knee of his handler as if warning him of impending danger. The trainer knew instantly that the moment had come. For quite twenty seconds the dog remained motionless, and sudden tremors passed through his body as if his heart were slowly breaking.

Greatheart's first impulse had been to rush up to his master, but sensitively conscious of the trainer's grip on the harness that told him only too clearly that the fellow was absolutely relying upon him for his safety, the dog held in check the wild craving he experienced. He knew only too well that the job he was doing now was more important than the work he had hitherto performed. The

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life of the man at his side depended upon him doing it well. That much he had understood almost from the very commencement of the training course, and the fact had been more than emphasized when he discovered his handler responding to his every move, and stumbling when he made some fault of which his handler had not been aware until the error had been made.

Greatheart continued to hesitate, torn between loyalty for his beloved master and the man at his side who was depending upon him.

The trainer was fully aware of the conflict in the dog's mind. Sympathetically, he spoke to him.

"Lead on, old fellow," he said.

Then Greatheart knew that he must go on.

The light went from his eyes, his tail drooped, and with a sobbing whine in his throat he led his handler forward . . . past the man he loved so well . . . straight on . . . not once looking back because he knew that the man at his side relied so completely upon him doing his job well. . . .

Greatheart had succeeded !

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During the journey back to the school, the trainer, whilst conscious of elation at Greatheart's achievement, was yet aware that the animal was moving at a slightly more rapid pace, and he was not in the least surprised when, on being released from duty, the dog turned, and not waiting to have his harness unbuckled, raced back towards the town.

The trainer stood at the gate of the school awaiting the next development, guessing exactly what it would be.

As he and Greatheart had returned by the shortest route, and it had been arranged that Lionel should be brought through the town as a preliminary to learning

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the main thoroughfares of the Spa, he felt the dog would overtake his master a short distance from the school itself.

Nor was his judgment at fault.

Greatheart, on reaching the High Street where he had seen his master and mistress, soon picked up their scent, and loping along swiftly with his nose to the ground, overtook them as they were about to turn into the road that led to the training centre.

The official who was accompanying them decided to act on his own initiative; and after Greatheart and his master had exhausted their excitement at the meeting, he placed Lionel's hand on the harness, and Greatheart commenced there and then what was to be his future mission in life.

And the trainer who was awaiting the outcome of Greatheart's impromptu adventure saw, with intense satisfaction, the party approaching the school, and knew that at last the dog was happy in the work for which he had at first shown so little enthusiasm.

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As a room was available in the centre itself, Lionel was to be housed on the premises during the period in which he was to undergo his part of the training. This was, in many ways, fortunate, for he was thus amongst people who not only understood the frustration most blind folk experienced, but knew exactly how best to deal with a case such as he presented.

Mrs. Radmore returned to Devonshire the same night, and after supper Lionel sat alone in the room that had been allotted to him, thinking mostly of Greatheart and doing his utmost to defeat the sense of helplessness he knew existed deep down in his mind.

Although the eye specialist who had examined him

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said that there was a possibility that one day he might regain a little of his sight, Lionel himself entertained no such hope. The mere fact that there had been no loss of time in his obtaining his discharge from the army, did not give him much courage for the future, and whenever he allowed himself to think of his blindness, he viewed it as a permanent disability, and fretted for the things he felt he would never see again.

There was, too, the recurring thought of Vivien Dayton, whom one day he had hoped to marry. That now, he considered, was utterly impossible, and the very thought of it and the many happy memories he cherished only renewed the sense of frustration in his soul. He remembered having read somewhere that no man could bid time return save in wholesome memory of the past. He supposed that was all he could do now. . . live in memories of the past, letting life itself slip by because it no longer possessed colour or movement, being but a succession of endless days girdled about with impenetrable darkness.

After panic at his fate had again possessed him and drained away, he flung himself on his bed, and spent his first night at the centre, twisting and turning in restless, tormented sleep, muttering occasionally words that seemed to be branded on his mind: "No man can bid time return save in wholesome memory of the past."

Meanwhile, Greatheart, the one faithful friend who might understand, lay quietly in his kennel, staring out into the starlit night and thinking of the master he had once lost and had now found.

For Lionel the road to freedom was to be difficult and tortuous. His state of mind made it difficult for him to concentrate on what he was expected to learn.

He had already commenced to master the rudiments of the Braille alphabet, but he was impatient, knowing that the blind world was so inferior to the world he had

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once known. He felt shut within four walls that permitted only sound to penetrate, knowing merely those contacts that were necessary to his existence. It was not until he commenced to study the district on a relief map that his interest was fully roused. He began to picture in his mind what those streets were like, but secretly despaired of ever walking along them.

In the meantime, he was also learning to put his complete trust in Greatheart. Practice lessons were given on passing turnstiles, gates, and other unusual obstacles. Lionel noticed how Greatheart drew back at every kerb, how—when crossing a quiet thoroughfare with one or other of the trainers riding along on a bicycle to test the animal's reactions—the dog halted until the cyclist had passed, and then took him to the opposite side of the street.

Greatheart's trainer admired to a point of enthusiasm the dog's unhesitating method of response. Where before the animal had lacked fire and zeal for his work, he now displayed both as if he knew that his master had changed, and could not do the things that had previously been so easy for him to attempt.

And as the awareness of his master's incompatibility steadily grew into actual knowledge that the man would never more do certain things without assistance from him, Greatheart began to understand the reason for the change in his training. Before he had been required to act as a guard dog, now he was required to be his master's custodian.

At mealtimes Greatheart was expected to lie quietly under the table, and when outdoors, crowded streets presented no problem he could not overcome. He knew exactly what to do.

And as his master's training continued and the animal realized how completely Lionel depended on him for everything, the dog commenced to exercise more

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than ever before the uncanny initiative that had always been a natural gift keenly developed during his long sojourn in the wild.

Though being constantly with Lionel, he knew the routine that accompanied his master's every action. Once when Lionel dropped his hairbrush and began to grope blindly for it, the dog retrieved the article and thrust it into his hand. On another occasion when Lionel had mislaid his indoor shoes, the dog searched around and brought them to him, again thrusting them into his hand.

The hardness that had imperceptibly crept into Radmore's heart commenced to disappear when he realized how well Greatheart had responded to his part of the training, and conscious that he would be disgracing the dog if he too did not fulfil his part of the bargain, Lionel commenced to react in a way that gave him new interests and a small degree of hope.

Eventually, there remained but for him to free his mind of the fear he possessed for the future, and that, he felt, was a problem that not even Greatheart could help him to solve. He would have to readjust himself without outside aid, and he began to think how best it could be done.

His walks abroad were altered so as to enable both dog and master to become conversant with the differently-shaped kerbs of the various streets, and whilst Lionel was expected to tell the dog whether to go forward, turn left or right, he noticed that if there were obstructions likely to prove dangerous, the dog disobeyed his words of command. There were times when the animal took him into the road to avoid something not familiar to him, returning him to the pavement when the danger spot was safely passed.

Radmore felt extreme satisfaction at Greatheart's work, and was completely at ease with the animal



"The dog searched around and brought them"



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leading him. What he did not know was that during most of his journeys abroad, he had been followed by the trainer who had also noted Greatheart's care and attention, particularly when passing another dog who seemed aggressive. Moreover, the dog had learnt to ignore cats, slightly turning his head when some spitting feline expressed displeasure at his appearance.

At the end of the fourth week it was obvious that both Greatheart and Lionel were fully proficient in their duties one to the other, and so came the time for Radmore's departure home.

Arrangements were made for Lionel to travel by train to Cheltenham where he was to change into another train going to the South-West of England, and on his last evening at the school Radmore sat out in the garden with Greatheart lying at his feet.

As Lionel puffed at his pipe, an idea began to take shape in his mind. Confident that Greatheart would see him through, he decided to say nothing to the official who had made the arrangements for his journey.

At last it seemed that he had found a way by which he could finally rid his mind of the fears that remained.

The sun, sinking slowly in the west, fell on both the man and his dog as they sat alone in the garden that was filled with the scent of lime trees and wild roses.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EARLY the next morning Lionel and Greatheart left the Guide Dog Centre. They were accompanied to the station by the official who had been responsible for their success together. As the train pulled away from the platform, Lionel gave a sigh of relief, and feeling Greatheart's body pressed close against his knees, was confident that he need never feel helpless while he had the dog to act as his eyes.

The train took over two hours to reach Cheltenham, going by way of Stratford-on-Avon and Long Marston, and when Lionel and Greatheart finally alighted, they heard a voice announcing on a loud speaker that the express for Bristol and the West was due to depart in ten minutes.

For a few seconds Radmore stood wondering if he dare proceed with the plan he had in mind. He was aware of Greatheart standing quietly beside him, waiting for the command to go forward.

A porter hurried past, and Lionel stopped him to ask where he could send a telegram. The man, familiar with blind men accompanied by guide dogs, said he would lead him to the telegraph office.

Radmore shook his head.

"Just explain where it is," he said, "and my dog will lead me."

Before the express had left for Bristol, Lionel had telegraphed his mother saying he would not be coming home for another week or so, and was already on his way along the crowded thoroughfare known as "The Promenade", intending to strike the road going north-west in the direction of Ross and Hereford.

He walked easily, a haversack containing his

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belongings slung across his shoulder, and Greatheart leading him with complete confidence and utter disregard for those curious folk who stood aside to let them pass.

His plan was at last set in motion, and as he strode along he saw it as the only means by which he could prove himself and obtain faith in his ability to overcome all obstacles peculiar to blind men. He felt that, alone with the dog, walking into country unknown to him, and learning for the first time to rely upon his adaptability in relationship to human contacts, he would regain a little of his pride and self-respect, and perhaps prove that he was not altogether helpless in the world of men and women.

Lionel also wanted to obtain that peace of mind he had lost, and he knew he would only achieve his purpose by being for a while alone with the one companion he could trust.

Leaving the Promenade behind, Radmore gave Greatheart his first command since leaving the station, indicating that he wished to be led across the road. This the dog did without hesitation, and the pair then proceeded on until Radmore heard the sound of a lorry travelling away to his right.

Scarcely a few seconds later, Greatheart halted, having come to a kerb, and Lionel guessed that he had reached the road he should take.

He said quietly, "Right, old fellow!"

Greatheart instantly turned right, thus leading his master out into the open country in the direction of the neighbourhood known as the Golden Valley and away from the roads that ran west to the land of the setting sun.

They halted an hour later where the sound of voices told of an inn where business was brisk.

Lionel and Greatheart entered the bar, and finding a

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secluded corner, Radmore ordered a meal for himself, part of which he gave to his dog.

Not long afterwards they were again on their way, and Lionel was content to leave himself to the guidance of Greatheart. He decided to travel on until he felt tired, and then to enquire at some cottage if lodging could be had for the night.

The day was inclined to be sultry. There was little wind to lighten the heaviness of the almost stifling air, and what clouds there were drifted lazily southwards, coming up from the west in wreathing skeins that were more like wisps of smoke than actual vapour suspended in the atmosphere.

Unknown to Lionel, Greatheart was becoming a little puzzled. On leaving the inn, he wanted to turn left, going back the way they had come, and it was only when his master said "Right!" that he continued in the direction indicated. More than once he looked up into Lionel's face, but seeing that it was expressionless, he led his master onward as instructed.

When late in the afternoon they rested in the shade of a tree, Greatheart nuzzled Lionel and commenced to whine. Radmore merely patted him, and said, "Good dog: You're doing well!" But Greatheart was not seeking praise. He wanted to tell his master that something was wrong, that they were going in the opposite direction to that which they should be going. Strange and mysterious impulses were stirring within him, and he was filled with a recurring uneasiness that would not let him rest. He continually faced westward, raising high his head and testing the air. And each time he whimpered in his throat and looked down at his master who lay stretched out on the ground with his head pillowed on his arm.

The dog knew instinctively that in the clouds coming up from the west was something that drew him, and he

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wanted to go towards them, leading his master away from this country that possessed none of the familiar landmarks of home.

Only that morning the trainer at the centre had patted him and said that soon he would be home. . . . And home was the word Lionel had often used when he said, "Home, pal," and Greatheart remembered that not many minutes later they both were at ease in the large kitchen where, in the chimney corner, was the chair in which his master usually sat. . . . And as Greatheart watched those western clouds, he seemed to see more clearly than ever that chair, and his master sitting in it as once he had sat in those far-off days before he had gone away and the farmhouse had become empty.

Greatheart's sense of orientation was struggling for utterance within him, and he wanted to go towards the west . . . the west where now he could see the sun slowly going down in a pomp of crimson and gold. . . .

Again he nuzzled his master, and Lionel, thinking the dog was eager to be on his way, rose to his feet and grasped the harness.

The dog immediately set off, and at Lionel's command to go right, did as he was told, but on reaching a point where a wide island marked the merging of the cross-roads below Coombe Hill, he turned in a complete circle with the result that, unknown to his master, they were going back towards Cheltenham and the roads that ran due west towards Bristol and the moorland country that lay beyond.

The dog was now happy. He walked with an easy stride and with a tail that waved from side to side. He did not know how he was to lead his master home to the farmhouse at the foot of Buckland Beacon in Devonshire. He only knew that he was heading in the right direction, and felt, obscurely, that one day he would again see the familiar valleys and outcrops of rocks.

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As they went on, the banners of the sunset flamed and died, and when at last the sun had gone, there was still light left in the western sky as if to show the dog the way he should go.

The two were successful in sleeping the night in a roadside cottage where the owner felt sympathetically disposed towards the blind man and his dog.

Since Lionel possessed sufficient money for his immediate requirements, early the next morning the cottager's wife went to the nearest village and brought back such provisions as the man might require, purchasing also a quantity of offal for the dog which she insisted on cooking before letting Lionel set off on his journey.

As the couple had asked few questions as to why a blind man should be alone on the road with only a dog to guide him, Lionel was spared having to give any explanation as to his movements. When he again set off on his way, he did so with an easy conscience and the knowledge that neither he nor Greatheart need starve for the next few days.

The road they now travelled went to Gloucester, and if Radmore continued to urge the dog forward, they would eventually join up with the main road to Bristol, passing en route Whitminster and Alveston.

So rapidly did they walk that in little less than two hours from leaving the cottage the pair were on the outskirts of Gloucester. Lionel, telling by the noise of passing traffic that they were approaching a busy district, continually commanded "Forward!" with the result that they were soon out of the city where, not many months before, Greatheart had been trained for army work.

Moreover, since his master's instructions had been urging him forward, Greatheart kept a straight course, heading for Bristol and the West Country.

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The day had become very hot, and the sun shone in a sky that was cloudless and intensely blue. Once away from the noise and dust of the city, the road was little troubled by traffic, and Lionel who, since his blindness, had developed an extraordinary sense of hearing, began to listen for the sibilant murmur of trees, intending to rest for a while in some shady spot.

Greatheart, too, was eager for a short respite, finding the heat rather trying, but showing little sign of distress save for his panting that warned his master that a halt must soon be made.

At last they reached an ascent in the road where it crossed a somewhat sluggishly flowing stream. As they approached the bridge, Lionel heard the sound of the water purling against the lichen-grey supports, and on finding himself being led downhill, bade the dog seek an opening away from the road.

This Greatheart did almost immediately, the country bounding the highway being more or less common land. A few minutes later the dog being released from duty, was wading in the river, while Lionel sat with his back against a tree listening to sounds that were already giving him a mental picture of the countryside.

He guessed that the ground hereabouts was covered with thick, tough grass, for he could hear larks singing high above him and knew that they nested in surroundings that were wild and remote. A little later he heard the drumming of a wood-pecker in the tree under which he was sitting, and not many minutes had passed before he heard the cawing of rooks which told him that near at hand was a rookery, obviously well populated judging from the noise the birds made as they passed to and fro about their business.

A lorry could be heard coming along the road, and for fear lest Greatheart should be in danger, Lionel called him. The animal came at once, resting his muzzle

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on his master's shoulder as if to tell him that he had heard the call and had obeyed.

Radmore instinctively looked towards the dog as if he would behold the animal which meant so much to him. But the wall of blackness was like a barrier between him and the one thing he felt he now loved. Still, he was conscious of relief at knowing Greatheart was close beside him, and he took the dog's head between his palms, murmuring again and yet again his name.

For a full hour they must have rested beneath the tree, and all the while the river flowed leisurely towards the Severn and the rooks continued to call and the larks to sing. . . . Life seemed very pleasant just then, and a strange peacefulness began to pervade Lionel's mind, almost as if he were gradually coming to some far haven of repose.

He could hear Greatheart breathing quietly, and felt the dog's head resting on his thigh. Every now and again Lionel permitted his fingers to wander behind the base of the pricked ears, and the dog quivered with delight, once raising his head and licking the members that were so gentle in their touch.

At last Lionel decided to press on, and after giving Greatheart a little of the food the old cottage woman had cooked for him, the two set off once again—still heading due west.

It was late in the afternoon when they came upon a few straggling cottages, and as Radmore had come to a decision not to ask the names of the places they were passing through, he merely enquired of a local inhabitant if accommodation could be had for the night.

The fellow directed them to the inn where the landlord was at first dubious about taking in a blind man and his dog. But when Lionel stated he was prepared to pay well for the night's lodging, the innkeeper offered no further objection, having found himself impressed by

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Radmore's manner of speech and his somewhat genteel appearance.

That night, as Lionel sat in the bar parlour, he discovered much to interest him. One of the regular customers was doing his utmost to convince a companion of the truth of a hunting story that was not only amusing, but to Radmore's mind the most outrageous lie he had ever heard uttered. Nevertheless, the story, well told, evoked a laugh from the others who were listening intently, and Lionel, too, found himself smiling.

When the inn closed Radmore immediately retired, and as he lay between the cool, clean sheets, feeling the breeze blowing in on him through the open casement, he knew that life was not so bad after all, and when he heard Greatheart sigh with contentment, he, too, voiced a sigh before falling into a deep sleep. . . .

* * * * *

They took the rest of the journey in easy stages, and two days later Lionel was aware that Greatheart was leading him along a wooded avenue. The breeze whispered in the tall trees, and once, when it blew from the west, it carried with it the salt breath of the sea.

Radmore was somewhat mystified. Still thinking he was going north-west, he considered that the coast must be a long way off. Yet again he seemed to taste on his tongue the salt brine of the sea, and the wind itself was different, no longer scented with things of the earth, but moist like the ocean that gave it birth. . . .

He bade Greatheart halt, and standing motionless, he sniffed the atmosphere and knew he was not mistaken. If they were not near to the sea itself, they were undoubtedly approaching some tidal estuary.

For the first time since having trusted himself in the dog's care, Lionel experienced a sudden qualm that

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developed into a rising panic within him. He calculated that by now they should be some few miles north of Ross—well on the road to Hereford. And there were no tidal rivers in that locality.

His hand unconsciously tightened on the dog's harness, and Greatheart, aware of the strained grip, looked up into his master's face.

Then Lionel uttered but two words:

"Forward, Greatheart!"

The dog instantly moved on, his master following with senses alert, straining his ears for some sound that might aid him to determine if he were indeed close to some tidal river.

One or two cars passed them, and Lionel heard them stop scarcely a couple of hundred yards ahead.

Suddenly the trees on the right became less dense; the woodland sloped away, and where it ceased was a rocky defile through which flowed a river. The tide was in and a steamboat was making its way up-stream. Flanking the opposite shore was a wide carriage road, while rising sheer above it were the glistening quartz-rock cliffs that made world famous the Avon Gorge at Clifton.

Whilst Greatheart could see the scenic transformation, his master could only sense it. The wind now blew in unbroken from the west, and it was definitely a sea wind. Moreover, the sound of a train passing far below told Lionel only too well that he was standing on a height, and that below was a railway line, and beyond it, either the sea or an estuary. . . .

Then he heard the sound of voices, and almost at once, Greatheart stopped, his body pressed against his master's leg as a man exclaimed:

"You have to pay toll to cross the bridge, sir!"

Nearby was a turnstile, and Greatheart, having been trained to avoid such obstacles, stood waiting,

ignoring entirely the man who repeated his previous request.

"Did you say 'bridge'?" Lionel asked, perplexed.

"That's right, sir . . . Clifton Suspension Bridge!"

Lionel lowered his head as if to look at Greatheart. The dog was gazing up into his face, and there was that in his eyes which seemed to betray the fact that he knew his master was near to discovering the trick he had played on him.

Meanwhile, the bridge official was watching them both in a somewhat suspicious manner. He suddenly realized that the man was blind, and felt embarrassed at not having noticed it before. But there had been nothing to warn him. The blind man's eyes seemed normal, save, perhaps, for a curious fixity about them. That was it. . . . A curious fixity and lack of expression.

Poor devil! Of course he did not realize he had reached the bridge. . . . That was it. . . . Only the dog knew!

"You can cross without paying toll," he remarked suddenly.

"Oh no, thank you! I'll pay!"

Having paid for the privilege to cross the bridge, Radmore gave the command "Forward."

But Greatheart drew back. He could not take his master through the turnstile.

The official interpreted correctly the dog's reluctance to move, and standing aside, indicated that both man and dog could enter by way of his private gate.

Greatheart understood, and the couple passed on to the precincts of the bridge, and a few seconds later were crossing the river that reflected the beauty and colour of the summer sky. . . .

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT was late the same evening that Lionel managed to find accommodation for the night in one of the outlying suburbs of the city. The room was not entirely to his liking, but having been unsuccessful elsewhere, he decided to take it and leave as early as possible in the morning.

He was some time in getting off to sleep. It was impossible not to worry over the fact that in some way or another his plans had gone awry. It did not occur to him to consider that perhaps Greatheart was mainly responsible. His only conclusion was that at some point his instructions to the animal had been misunderstood, and instead of going north, they had travelled south-west.

With a sense of fatalism now peculiar to him, Radmore decided to accept the change, knowing that soon he would be getting back on familiar ground, and as he was already conscious of certain readjustments having taken place in his mind, he did not view the matter seriously as he might otherwise have done.

Next day both man and dog were again on their way, and this time, by design and not by accident, they travelled the road that led to Axbridge and Brent. Once away from the scattered suburbs of Bristol, Lionel resolved to let Greatheart use his own initiative. As he knew a little of the general lay of the country through which they must pass, Lionel felt he need only give such instructions to the dog as were necessary to keep heading towards mid-Somerset and Devon.

In this conjecture he did Greatheart an injustice, for the animal was fully aware of the direction he intended going. His sense of orientation was now the

most dominant instinct in him, and he seemed to know that he was getting nearer to that grey granite country once so familiar to him.

Once past Brent, Greatheart began to sense things he had known during his long trek from the Mendips to Exmoor. He glimpsed Crooks Peak near which he had been born, and then Brent Knoll, and knew them to be landmarks he had once passed when travelling towards the west to escape the wrath of those who were intent on hunting him as they had once hunted and destroyed Reynard of the split ear. Then when the road Greatheart and his master were travelling hugged close the railway line to Bridgwater and Taunton, the sense of familiarity was even more firmly established in the dog's mind, reminding him of a night long ago when he had caught a rabbit on the embankment and then rested in a trough dug to drain flood-water from the track above. When a train passed, Greatheart knew more assuredly than ever that he was on the way home, but he could not take his master across the railway track until he came to a level crossing. And he felt he should be on the other side of the railway, for beyond it lay the rising uplands leading to the western moors. . . .

Lionel, who had shown a preference for the long, straight roads, was suddenly aware that Greatheart was anxious to leave them, and despite his commands to go forward, there was a certain reluctance on the dog's part to obey, although he did so because he had been trained to co-operate with the master he was now expected to lead.

One morning after a long rest, Radmore began to analyse Greatheart's persistent urge to go across open country. He knew that the direction the animal wished to take was certainly westward, but felt that there must be a reason for it. Then it suddenly occurred to Lionel that perhaps the dog knew this part of the country—had

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perhaps lived in the locality before he came to Dartmoor.

Lionel it was who now became puzzled. He admitted that he knew little of the dog's history, and it was clear that Greatheart was not altogether a stranger to the country through which they were now passing.

It was then that Lionel made what to him was an important decision. Remembering having read somewhere that most animals—dogs in particular—had a highly developed "homing" instinct, he resolved to prove if this were indeed true, and instead of giving the animal definite orders, place himself entirely in Greatheart's care and then await the result.

When next they set off, Greatheart was merely told to lead onward, and before long Radmore was aware that they were travelling across almost unbroken country, passing through Nether Stowey and finally climbing an immense range of hills which he guessed were the approaches to the Quantocks.

The days now were no longer hot and stifling. Winds from the distant moors served to refresh the summer air, and at times carried the pungent scents of heather and peat which roused in Lionel's mind nostalgic yearnings that made him think tenderly of the white farmhouse at the foot of Buckland Beacon.

He was also learning things he had never known before. His blindness seemed unimportant when compared with the senses of touch and hearing. Even the placing of his feet upon unfamiliar ground told him something. He knew for instance that Greatheart was leading him along a track that followed an even course across a group of hills, and again was it the old ridgeway above Bagborough along which Greatheart had come on his journey west in those far-off days before he became the servant of man. He knew also that it was a solitary place they were traversing, where the only sound was the

cry of a high-flying bird or the soft murmur of the breeze among woods of larch and elder.

They slept one night in a disused stone-mason's hut—the same in which the dog had slept on that previous journey he had made. On other occasions, they spent the night in farmhouses where, without exception, they were regarded with pity by the farmers and their wives.

But always when they set off the next morning, Lionel was conscious of a definite eagerness in the dog to be on his way. He moved easily, but still with due consideration for his master. There were times when he deliberately sought out a secure path for him to follow, and never did he try to force a hedge or wall, but always led Lionel to a gate so that he would not stumble or come to harm.

At last the pair reached the foot hills of Exmoor, and although it was getting on towards evening, and long rivers of translucent light spread across the western skyline, Greatheart led his master onward until he saw, not a great distance away, the bald crest of Cloutsham Ball where once he had sensed the naked earth becoming warm with spring. . . .

In his efforts to keep to clearly defined paths and highways, Greatheart had gone a little south from the route he had previously taken, and following the lower road through Knowle to Wootton Courtney, now found himself east of Brockwell.

As the sunset quietly faded, a light gleamed for one short moment from a farmhouse down in the valley, and knowing that his master must rest for the night, the dog whined—a habit he had acquired when he wanted to let Lionel know that he was ready to move on.

That twinkling light had awakened in Greatheart some dormant memory, and when next morning they again set off across the moors, the dog could still see,

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in his mind's eye, the gleam of gold as once he had seen a similar gleam striking far across the valley from a small white cottage near the edge of an Exmoor coombe.

The day was not very promising. Both the farmer and his wife with whom they had stayed for the night warned them that squally weather was expected.

Greatheart and his master had not been much more than an hour on their journey before a high wind commenced to sweep the clouds in wild confusion across the sky. A peregrine falcon from Lundy seemed to be riding high above the quickly moving masses of almost dark vapour, and once or twice the dog glimpsed cows and sheep herded together, standing with their tails to the wind, while over the hidden water courses swallows, martins and swifts flew low, almost skimming the ground in their noiseless flight.

Greatheart sniffed the atmosphere as he carefully led his master onward, and he knew that soon it would rain. Lionel too, extremely weather-wise, sensed that rain was not far off, and he only hoped he would obtain shelter before the threatened storm broke.

Then Greatheart remembered what he had almost forgotten. . . . It was the memory of the gleam of lamp-light that brought the time and place to life in his mind. . . . He remembered the cottage at Cloud where, with his master, dwelt the dog Storm of Dancerwood.

In another few minutes the first of the rain came sweeping over Dunkery Beacon, and far away over the Brendons the clouds were racing ragged and grey, whitened in places where hidden gleams of sunlight touched them before becoming lost in the gloom of the fast approaching storm.

Greatheart had taken a path that skirted the Long Stoke Ridge and wound across the moor towards Oareford and the Badgworthy Water. As the wind reached greater force, the whin bushes swayed and danced, and

when the dog reached the high-lying ground of Lucott Moor, with his master somewhat breathless after the strenuous climb, Greatheart saw the distant mountains of Dartmoor looming large and in sharp relief on the western horizon. For an instant the dog hesitated, his nostrils testing the currents of air, while an excited look came into his eyes as he scented in the wind a faint taint that reminded him of the Dart river and the deep moorland pools that not even a summer's sun could lighten. . . .

Radmore, who had realized that the dog was intent on leading him to shelter, let the animal continue along the course he had taken. Whilst the rain was falling heavily on the southern slopes of Dunkery, on Lucott Moor and South Common, only a fine mist was evident, and even the force of the wind was broken by the ridge of hills above Brendon on the near Devon border.

Once a swiftly running stream brought a sharp musical note to the man's ears, and the dog had to make a wide detour to get his master around it.

Not many minutes later they ascended a plateau on which were numerous dewponds, and Lionel knew that they were in a place favoured by small birds, for he could hear them winging upwards with piping cries as both he and the dog approached. A little later he heard a thrush whistle a note of warning from his vantage point in a thorn tree. Almost instantly, Greatheart began to lead him downhill, past a turbulent river which they crossed by means of an old causeway of the clapper type, and then along a narrow depression which Radmore guessed was a typical Exmoor coombe.

By now the clouds had darkened steadily in the west, and were massing ominously over Farley and Shilstone Hill, soon to break in drenching rain in the direction of Oare.

But Greatheart had almost reached his objective—

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the small white cottage which, long ago, he had visited when in search of companionship. . . .

This time there were signs of somebody being at home; a wisp of blue smoke was blown in sudden scurries from the old-fashioned chimney, and Greatheart, sniffing it, waved his tail and without hesitation turned in at the gate and led his master straight up the path to the front door.

A deep throated bark came from inside the cottage, and Storm of Dancerwood, rearing himself up on hind legs, looked out of the window—a lively interest expressed in the quick movement of his almost laughing eyes. . . .

Somebody told him to be quiet, and he immediately followed when he heard his master hasten to the front door in response to a somewhat timid knock.

When the door was opened, Lionel became aware of Greatheart sniffing noses with another dog, and the sudden fear he experienced was soothed away by a cultured voice asking, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Radmore felt a little embarrassed when he explained that his dog had led him to the cottage, adding, "I expect he was anxious to find me shelter before I got soaked by the rain."

Storm's owner, noticing the Guide harness, realized that the man was blind, and asked him to come in.

He gripped his own dog by the collar and stood aside to allow the visitors to enter.

Greatheart, understanding that he could take his master into the cottage, led him gently up the small step and into the narrow hall with its queer, twisting staircase. The dog then turned into the room which, on a previous occasion, he had glimpsed when he had stared through the window and saw Storm dozing before the fire and his master sitting at ease in the large chair set in the chimney corner.

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Storm was anxious to make friends with the newcomer, but noticing how Greatheart's master kept a firm hold on the harness, the dog sat back on his haunches and waited.

When later Lionel was relaxed in the naturalist's favourite chair, and both Greatheart and Storm lay close together on the hearth-rug, the man decided to ask what he thought might be considered an impertinent question.

"Have you any idea what made your dog lead you here?" he remarked slowly. "This cottage, you see, is rather off the beaten track, and his bringing you here has rather intrigued me."

Radmore shook his head.

"I must admit that I am rather curious on that point," he answered. "When we first set off this morning, he was following a definite course across the moor. Suddenly I was aware that he had changed his direction, and I noticed that every now and again he tested the air and seemed to quicken his pace after having done so."

The naturalist was closely watching Greatheart as he lay stretched out beside his own dog, Storm. He was thinking back to the day when Storm had brought a similar animal across the moor to him—an animal both wild and undisciplined. He thought too of the enquiries he had made some days later at Minehead when he had been shown a handbill offering a reward for the capture, dead or alive, of a dog reputed to have been a sheep-killer in the neighbourhood of the Mendips.

Greatheart, as if conscious of the searching examination he was receiving, raised his head and stared back at the naturalist. The man gave a slight nod and smiled. His keen eyes had noticed the quick, upward tilt of the dog's ears—a characteristic habit of that strange dog Storm had met on the moor, and viewing this in relationship to what Greatheart's master had just said, the

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naturalist felt more than reasonably sure that the Guide dog and the once undisciplined animal were one and the same.

Leaning forward towards Lionel, he said :

"Tell me. . . . How did you come by your dog? Did you get him from the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association?"

"No." And Radmore, feeling for the first time the desire to exchange confidences with this person whom he felt he could trust, commenced to tell what he knew of Greatheart, starting from the point where he had first made the animal's acquaintance and going on until he came to the period of his training at the school in Leamington.

"And after that?" prompted the other.

Lionel hesitated a moment, and then explained how he had wanted to travel north instead of returning home, but that somehow his plans had gone wrong, and he had found himself at Bristol, practically on the direct route for home.

The naturalist nodded his head, and then proceeded to tell Lionel what he now considered was Greatheart's history prior to the dog journeying on to Devon.

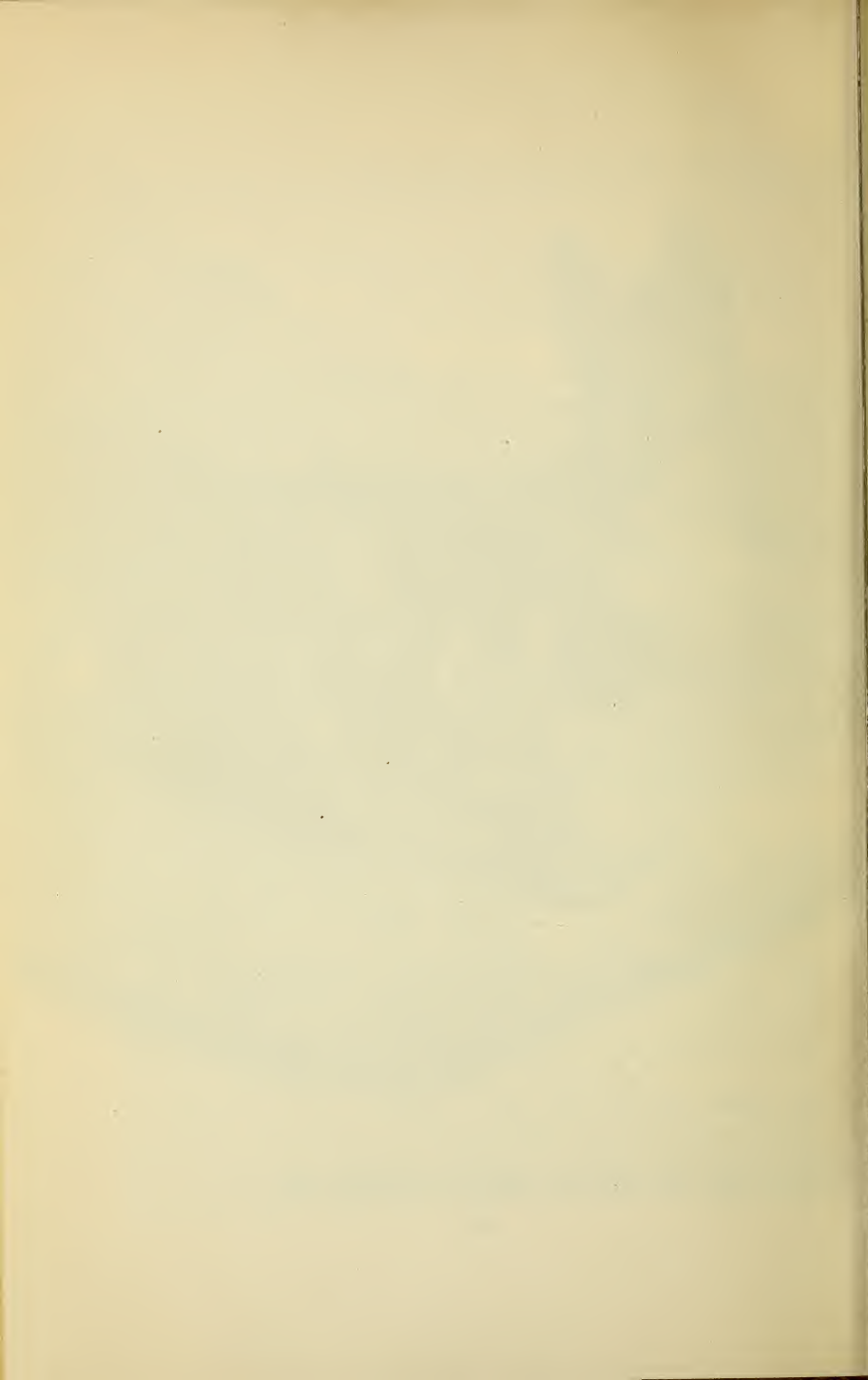
Radmore was at first greatly perturbed when he heard that perhaps his dog was once a notorious sheep-killer, but the naturalist told him not to worry on that account.

"That's all forgotten now. Besides, if he is indeed the same dog, how magnificently he has retrieved his unfortunate past. . . . It is almost as if he is a 'Salvation Hunter' . . . seeking his salvation in loyal service to the one man to whom he has given his heart."

Lionel agreed, and that night after dinner, when the wind threw the rain in stinging lashes against the window, the two men sat talking until the hours to midnight were worn by their words into the first hours of a new day.



"Greatheart and Storm lay close together on the hearth-rug"



GREATHEART

And all the while their dogs lay fast asleep before the blazing log fire, and the wind battered at the cottage door and sent the raindrops spitting down the wide chimney.

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Dunkery Beacon reared its massive shoulders above the purple and golden beauty of Exmoor; many a glittering stream interlaced the far distant valleys, and on the southward slope of the hill where lay Selworthy with its age-old cottages clustered around a tree-guarded lawn, a family of magpies were chattering and calling as if expressing their annoyance at Raark, the heron, who had temporarily invaded their domain.

Their voices carried far across the moor, and other magpies took up the complaint. The blind man and his dog, who were once again on their journey westward, heard them as they strode along the old coach road that wound from Exmoor into mid-Devon where line after line of rock-crowned peaks fell back towards the inner heart of Dartmoor.

Lionel listened to the distant voices of the magpies, and then said quietly :

"One for sorrow; two for joy; three for a wedding; four to die; five for silver; six for gold; seven for a secret never to be told."

He laughed, and Greatheart looked up into his face, and as the dog opened his jaws to pant, it was almost as if he too were laughing with the master, who, since leaving Cloud, had appeared so happy and care-free.

Lionel was indeed light-hearted. His brief stay with the naturalist and Storm had done much to give him a new interest in life. He felt he had made a friend, and when he refused the naturalist's offer to walk part of the

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way with him, it was not because he wished to be alone, but merely that he desired to test to the utmost Greatheart's "homing" instinct.

Before he left the cottage at Cloud, Storm's master had supplied him with fresh provisions, including sufficient meat and biscuits for Greatheart. Lionel therefore sensed that he was well-equipped for the long journey he had to make towards the Devon hills which were still so far away.

And as Radmore and Greatheart swung along the old coach road, from a high hill above Lank Coombe, Storm and his master watched them until they turned west a couple of miles south of Brendon Two Gates. Here Greatheart struck across the open moor in an effort to pick up the path he had once followed when he trailed the two otters—Huicie and Soft Ear.

It was getting on towards noon when the dog finally brought his master to the region of the marshes where the otters had spent an afternoon searching for frogs.

The dog indicated that they should rest, and Radmore, having become fully conversant with Greatheart's signals, sat down on a boulder and commenced to eat his mid-day meal, while the dog slaked his thirst in the small tarn that had once delighted Huicie and Soft Ear.

Greatheart was happy and confident. He knew the way home as surely as he knew the familiar sight of the cottage at Cloud and the farmhouse at the foot of Buckland Beacon. The otters, on their migration westward, had followed the ancient otter's trail; it was clearly defined across the heather and grassland, and the dog realized that it should not present much in the way of difficulty for his master.

Late that evening the couple had reached a river that was obviously tidal, and were fortunate in obtaining accommodation in an almost ruinous cottage where lived an old fisherman. The fellow was glad of

company, and talked garrulously of the many large-sized trout he had caught in the river, Lionel understanding from his furtive manner that the old chap was really meaning salmon poached out of season.

Next day found Radmore and Greatheart at a point where the main river was joined by a smaller tributary. Lionel, desiring to rest awhile, was content to listen to the river tumbling into what he guessed was an expanse of water where, judging from the sounds he heard, fish were more than merely plentiful.

Far off was heard the whistle of an engine, and when an hour later the dog led his master across one bridge and then under another, he knew the second to be a railway viaduct, for a signal falling into position told him clearly that a train was about due. Nor was he wrong, for not many minutes had passed before a train was heard rumbling over the viaduct on its way to Barnstaple.

As day succeeded day, Greatheart led his master nearer to the granite hills that were home. They passed the region known as Devon Hunt, and late that same week reached the river that had its source high up on Cawsand Beacon on Dartmoor.

Here Lionel found the going much harder than he had anticipated, but Greatheart was exceedingly cautious, leading him past treacherous obstacles, and taking such care of him as was necessary for his well-being.

Gradually the meadows gave way to rough moorland. There was a fresh wind blowing from the south, and at sunset the fantastic peaks ahead assumed a formidable aspect on the skyline. During the starlit hours, only the cry of a curlew disturbed the solitudes, while the dawn was often greeted by the raucous voices of herons flying towards the distant marshlands in which to fish.

Greatheart knew that the long trek westward was

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coming to an end. The river, running noisy and shrill, told exactly the same story it had related on that other occasion when the dog followed its winding course—the story of those grey granite moors that hid the spring which gave it birth. Moreover, the castle-like tors brought to mind that first misty morning when the dog had glimpsed them, and Belstone appeared to mark the very edge of the world.

Noon the next day found the dog leading his master around the foot of Belstone Cleave. The animal had discovered a path that went a little north-west of the trail the otters had taken, but it led direct to the stream in which Huicie had played and ultimately found a bottle containing the fish which he had tried in vain to release. The stream presented something of a problem, for Greatheart wished to get his master safely on to the opposite bank. At last he accomplished this by coming to a spot where it ran shallow over a rocky bed.

Greatheart stopped and whined before attempting to make the crossing, and Lionel, who knew they were close to a stream, understood that the dog wished to lead him to the other side.

He accordingly knelt down, while Greatheart watched him with curiosity in his brown eyes.

Lionel plunged one hand into the stream and found it less than a few inches deep. Feeling the rocky bed, he knew he could wade across without difficulty.

In a moment he had taken off his shoes and socks, and with Greatheart close beside him, he crossed without mishap to the opposite bank.

A little later both were again on their way, Greatheart having instinctively picked up the trail he had followed when in search of the otters.

It was getting late in the evening when the dog brought his master to the marshes abounding Raybarrow Pool. A vague memory tormenting him, caused him to

hesitate before proceeding farther. There was no visible sign of habitation in this dreary neighbourhood of rock and river, and when his master decided to rest awhile, Greatheart cast about until he discovered a grassy spot to the leeward of one of the tors.

He returned to Lionel and whined, and his master, understanding that the dog wished to move on, grasped the harness and was led to the spot which Greatheart had selected as their resting-place for the night.

When the dog turned round and round as if stamping down his bed, Radmore knew that here they must stay the night, and as the evening was warm he guessed that he would suffer no discomfort from sleeping rough on what he sensed was Dartmoor itself.

Lionel had a meal, drinking what was left of the tea in the thermos. Greatheart, too, received his usual portion of meat and by the time the moon was rising high over the moor both were asleep, Radmore protected by his raincoat, and the dog lying close beside him as if to give his master the warmth of his own body.

Following their usual habit they were up and away soon after sunrise, Greatheart keeping to fairly high ground. He recalled, without conscious effort, the colt which had been trapped in the bog near Raybarrow Pool. As he led his master onward, he saw once again the memorable scene of the pony standing wild-eyed and frightened on a patch of quaking mire, while over him circled two curlews whose flight was slow and measured as if they sensed that death—the dark destroyer—was hovering near at hand.

Once past Raybarrow, with the shape of Belstone Tor becoming less marked on the skyline, the dog found the path was easier to follow, with the result that his master walked without difficulty at his side. The weather continued fair, and that night the pair were able to find shelter in a quarryman's cottage.

GREATHEART

They had not been long on their journey the following day before Lionel was aware of a new eagerness in the dog to press onward. The animal's pace was a little quicker, for he had seen on the horizon the wooded slopes of the familiar hills near Holne.

Then Lionel, too, became conscious that the character of the countryside was changing, for his feet, passing over ground that was less rough, told him that they were leaving behind the more desolate wastes of the moor.

They breasted the rise that finally brought them to the hut circles south of Yar Tor, and Greatheart, to avoid an expanse of boggy ground, turned sharply towards the north and led his master downhill towards the Coffin Stone above the Dartmeet Bridge.

Greatheart was panting with excitement, for down in the valley was the winding streak of the Dart river itself, and under the sunlight and the blue sky, it shone like a ribbon of silver, twisting amidst banks of vivid green with woodlands here and there almost hiding its course.

The hills rising above the valley were for the most part cultivated, and none of the wildness of Dartmoor was apparent, each field being hedged in traditional manner, and at this time of year resembled more than ever a colourful quilt of haphazard design.

Greatheart viewed the prospect with joyful anticipation, and when a bend in the track brought into his line of vision the old grey-stone bridge near which the East river joined with the West tributary, the dog felt his whole being quivering with excitement. Memory took the place of instinctive orientation; he knew that beyond the wooded slopes of Holne Chase was Buckland Beacon and the farmhouse which was home. . . . He remembered with exceptional clearness the two otters, and his tail waved as he recalled with exactness their shape and

form where before, during this long trek westward, he had merely remembered them as vague, almost shadowy, animals he had once followed from the distant heights of Exmoor.

Lionel, too, felt he was nearing home. The sound of running water was clearly heard as Greatheart led him down a grassy slope. Then the far-off cawing of rooks told him that the wooded country of Dartmoor was close at hand. The air, too, was warmer, possessing none of the keenness of the mid-moorland winds, and realizing that Greatheart had exercised much care in leading him across what was considered the most treacherous stretch of country in England, he could not resist saying :

"You've been a wonderful fellow, Greatheart ! No one but you could have done it !"

The dog looked up into his face. He understood that his master was pleased with him, and experienced satisfaction at having done his duty well.

Not many minutes later he led Lionel on to the road that crossed the Dartmeet Bridge. Radmore, feeling the even surface under his feet, wondered if the dog intended following the road for the remainder of the way. They reached the centre of the bridge, and Greatheart stopped and whined.

Lionel, thinking that perhaps the animal wished to be free for a few seconds, released his hold on the harness.

Greatheart immediately stood up on his hind legs, and stared over the parapet of the bridge. He saw—as once before from Holne Bridge—the turbulent water of the East and West Dart, watching how it swirled over the boulders with a sharp treble note that was so reminiscent of the day when he had seen Huicie and Soft Ear playing in the pool just below the falls.

There were no otters visible now ; indeed he had

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known that he would not see them. But . . . and his ears came sharply erect . . . far down-stream he heard a sharp whistling cry, "Huicie . . . Huicie. . . ." He listened intently, but the call was not repeated. All he heard was the staccato music of the river and the cooing of some pigeons in the trees, and the resounding splash of a trout which leapt for a multi-coloured fly hovering above the surface of one of the pools between the boulders.

The remainder of the journey was easily accomplished. Greatheart soon saw the slopes of Buckland Beacon rising up before him, and as he had indeed kept to the road, taking instinctively those bye-ways that led towards the village, it was not long before he glimpsed the church tower and then the grey-stone cottages.

It was a beautiful evening—this evening of their home-coming. The sun sank slowly in a cloud-flecked sky, and the western hills seemed etched against the colourful panorama of the day's departing glory. Over the church tower swallows and martins twisted and turned in joyful flight. Far off a sheep bleated plaintively; from some hidden farmstead a cow lowed and a dog barked.

Greatheart walked on resolutely, his head held high, his beloved master treading without hesitation at his side. . . . And so they came to the village, passed the picturesque farms and cottages and finally set foot on the lane that led to the white farmhouse that Greatheart knew as home.

The couple had not passed unnoticed through the village. Somebody commenced to run up the hill to the house where Vivien Dayton lived, and a few of the more curious followed Lionel and Greatheart as they walked confidently towards the farm.

None dared to approach too close. This was something that had never happened before, and to them it was almost as if they were witnessing a miracle.

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Without the slightest falter in his steps, Greatheart came to the gate leading into the farmyard, and as Lionel passed through, he heard a short cry from somebody who had seen them. The next thing he knew was that he had released his grip on Greatheart's harness, and felt his mother's arms about him. . . . Then another voice spoke . . . Vivien's. . . .

And as his mother set him free, he knew that Vivien was holding him close, and her tears of joy brought to him the knowledge how greatly he was loved and how long he had been away from those to whom he meant so much.

And as the sun sank below the shoulder of Buckland Beacon, and twilight came creeping up the valley, all four—the two women and the man, closely followed by the dog who was the man's eyes—passed into the quietness of the place that was home.

As the few villagers turned away, talking of the miracle that had come to pass, the lamp was lit in the large kitchen where, as always, burned the wood fire on the hearth, warming Greatheart as he lay at peace in the place where he belonged.

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When you wander in the grey granite country of the west, in the beautiful valley below Buckland-in-the-Moor, you may come upon a quaint farmhouse lying within the shadow of Buckland Beacon.

It is a peaceful farmhouse; everything about it has the charm and mellowness of age. Out on the hills you might find the good farmer himself who was once blind and depended upon his dog to lead him. Within the open doorway of the farmhouse, you are sure to find the dog himself, his muzzle fast turning grey and his eyes

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not quite so keen as once they had been. He now loves nothing better than to look after his master's baby daughter, and is devoted in his self-imposed duty.

One afternoon in early spring, a tourist was attracted to the farmhouse in search of tea, and was formally introduced to the dog whose name he learnt was Greatheart. After admiring both the animal and his young charge, he was conducted into the old-fashioned kitchen where his charming hostess had prepared an equally old-fashioned Devonshire tea. On enquiry, he was told a little of the dog's history, and when he finally took his departure, he ascended the hill, filled with wonder at what he had heard.

His way to Halshanger lay across the Beacon height, and as he climbed the fields towards the open moorland, he noticed the farmer busily engaged in ploughing.

It was a very warm evening. When he had reached an old thorn tree on the edge of a coombe, he rested awhile. The spot was quiet and deserted, and the old thorn tree seemed lifeless but for its creamy blossoms that scented the air.

The tourist lit a cigarette. He stared down the slope and as the sun had already disappeared behind the hills, he noticed that the farmer had unharnessed his horses and was preparing to lead them down towards the farm.

Suddenly a dog came loping up the hill to meet him. The farmer waited. When the dog had reached him, the man started to lead the horses downhill, his canine companion keeping close at his side, almost as if he felt that his master still depended upon him.

In less than fifteen minutes, the tourist had seen the horses stabled for the night, and had witnessed the farmer and the dog being greeted at the farmhouse door by the young woman who had given him tea. They

disappeared within, and almost at once a lamp shone through the window of the kitchen, and he knew that the happy family, including the old lady who was the farmer's mother, were sitting down to their evening meal.

The tourist stubbed his cigarette, and thinking of the dog who even now took it upon himself to guide his master home, turned to press on across the moor to Halshanger.

The dusk was already deepening in the cleaves, and a mumuration of starlings passed high over the beacon flying in the direction of Holne Chase. When halfway down the slope, and close to Welstor Common, the tourist looked back.

The old thorn tree was silhouetted against the evening sky, and one bright star seemed to shine directly above it. White and gleaming, it hung like a lamp burning above the foothills of the infinite, and only the silver slipper of the new moon detracted from its beauty.

With a short sigh the man continued on his way, and still thinking of that contented family who dwelt in the farmhouse at the foot of the hill, he rejoiced in the peacefulness of the night and the knowledge that there was still happiness abroad in the world.

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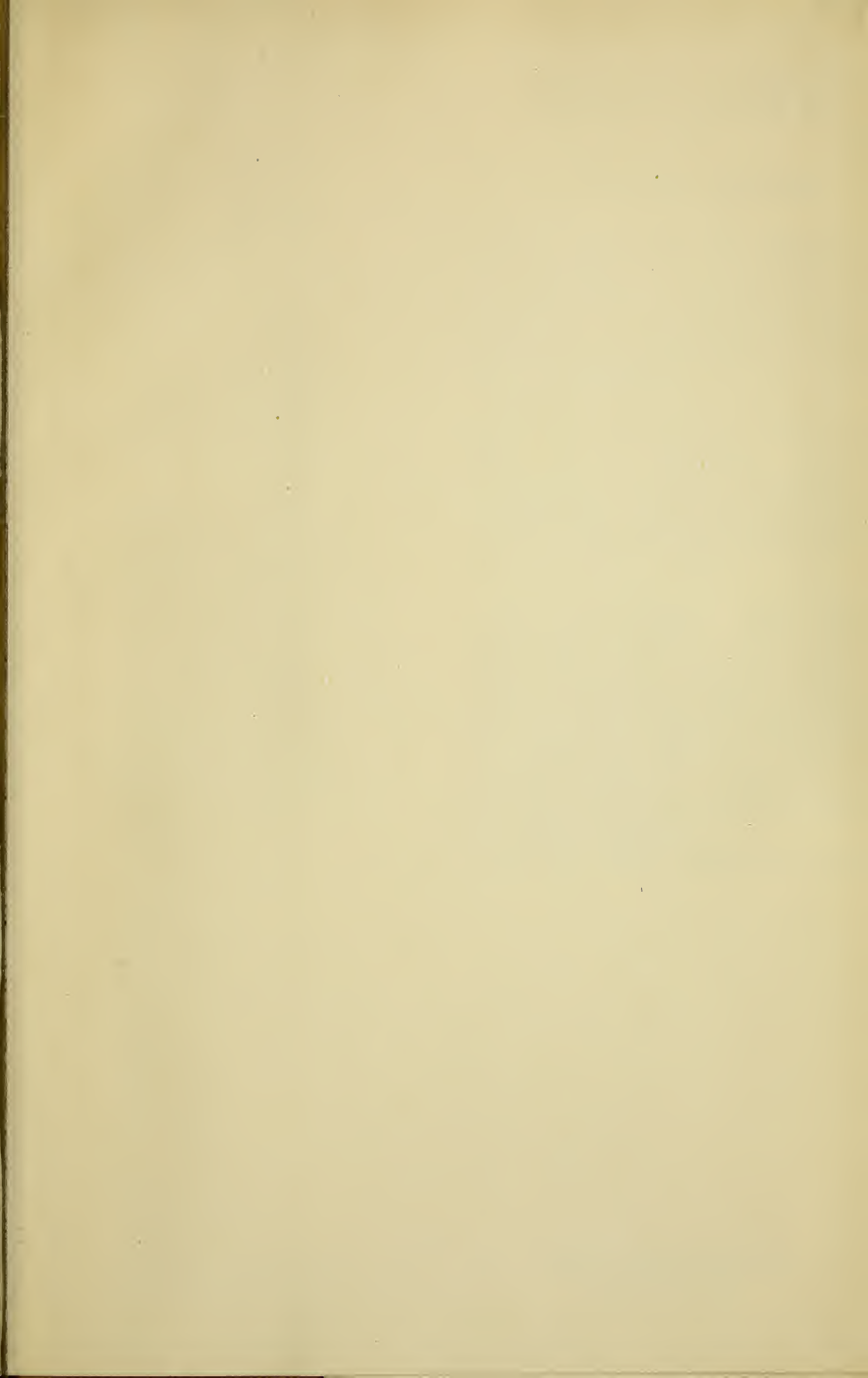
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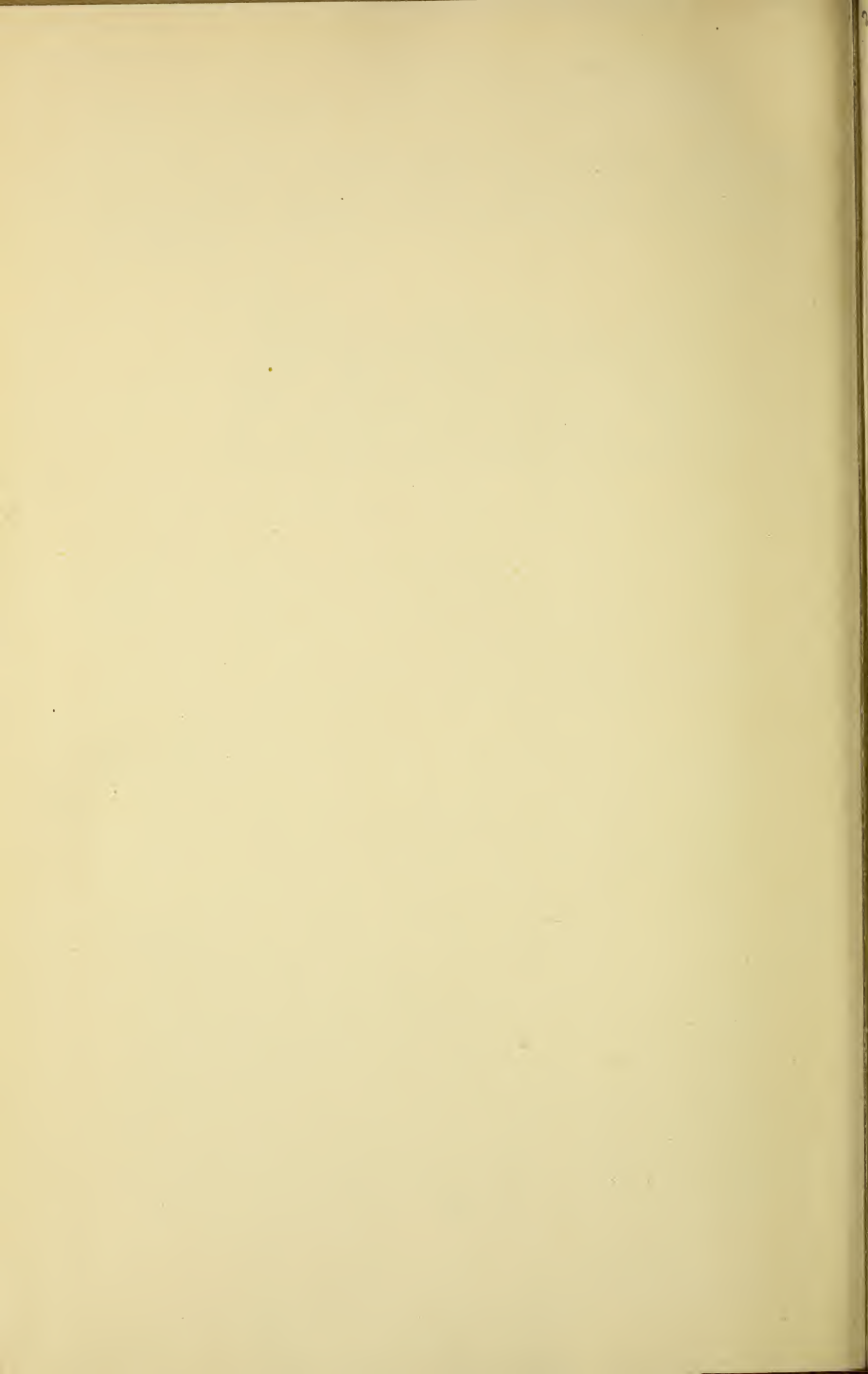
In the kitchen of the farmhouse, the fire burnt low, leaving just a ruddy glow on the raftered ceiling. Now and again a flickering cinder would fall on to the hearth, or a sudden draught from the chimney would turn the embers into fitful flame. Then would be illumined the old-fashioned objects of the room—the copper cooking utensils that stood on the large oak dresser—the table

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with the cloth already set for the morning meal—the baby's chair with its warped rockers, but above all—Greatheart!—still on duty, guarding the sleep of those he loved.

*Here ends the History of Greatheart
"THE SALVATION HUNTER"
Begun one Spring in the County of Devon,
and completed in the Summer of the
following year in the County of Cornwall*





27

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